BLOODY MAN BY AVRAM DAVIDSON

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Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

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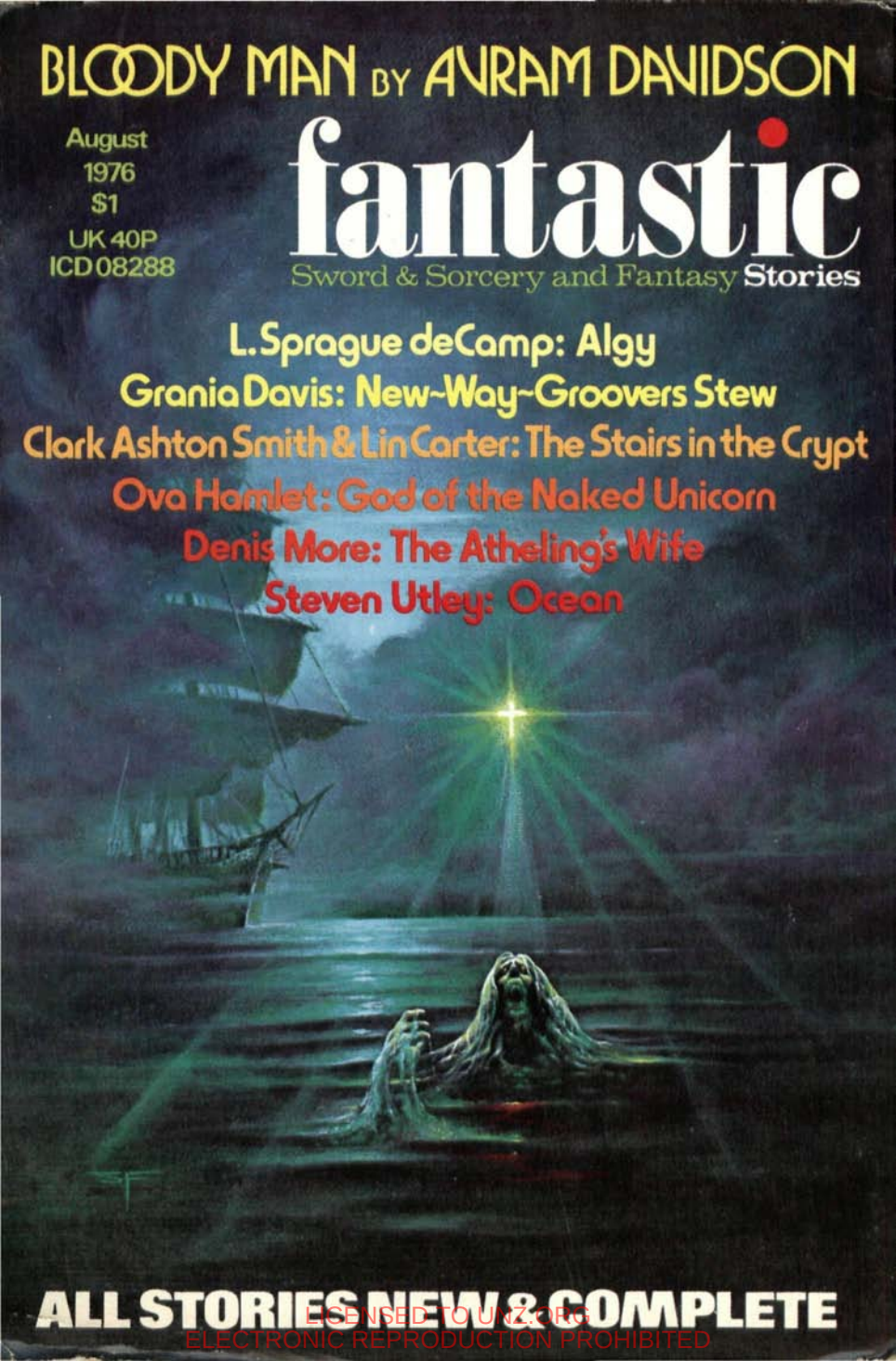

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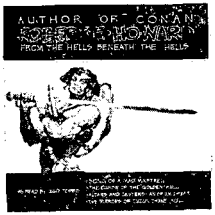

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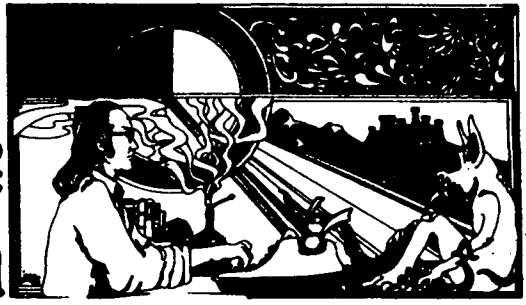
TED WHITE editorial



A QUESTION OF GOR: A year ago—in the August, 1975, issue of this magazine—I wrote an editorial which I called "You'll Never See It Here". In the body of that editorial I quoted several passages from a book called *Marauders of Gor*. They were passages in which women were tortured, either by the narrator-protagonist or in his presense and with his compliance, in order to induce in those women a willingness for sexual intercourse with the narrator-protagonist or the company of men of which he was a part. The thinking revealed in the narrator-protagonist's reasoning was that more commonly found in badly written bondage-type pornography. The actual writing was not much better.

That editorial produced a volume of mail which has yet to diminish. The general response divided itself into two groups—those who defended the Gor novels, and those who did not. The defenders said that things like this had happened before and might be presumed to happen again—on another planet, within the realm of the Gor mythos. Others said that they'd enjoyed earlier books in the series, but at some point the "good fantasy" had turned sour, culminating in the book I objected to. Yet others said that there was no real difference between the Gor novels and the sword & sorcery stories we've published here. And others . . .

I have on hand two letters, which—in combination—make an interesting point. I'd like to quote the relevant portions of each here.

The first is from David Shanken, of Virginia. He says, "Frankly your recent experiments with porno-SF are not to my liking. Don't think that I have any dislike for hot buttered pornography per se, but when combined with SF it destroys that indefinable element in SF that has enthralled me since the age of nine. Twelve inch peckers, sadistic lesbians, beautiful blonde white women fucking well set up blacks are fine subject for fiction but why place them on other planets or through space warps?

"I don't question your judgment as far as the overall market for your magazines. You know far better than I what will help or hinder your magazines. But as for me, a story that tries to be SF and porn is neither SF nor good porn."

The second letter, from Karl May of Wisconsin, is longer. Here it is:

"It's an early spring morning where I'm writing this. I'm enjoying a last peaceful half-hour before going out to help tend the machines. It was the same yesterday at this time when I was reading *According to You* in the Feb. FANTASTIC. I'm writing because

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what I read was distressing.

"My heart is bombarded by heavies to read the ravings of pro-censorship. Until very recently fantasy and sf have been rejected by English lit people because it was too shallow. Now I cannot understand why the readers are being so shallow. Censorship, in any form, is an act by one faction of society to promote its views by repressing the views of another faction of society. We have at the top of our pines a whisper of a free society. Why do you want to make that whisper more and more quiet? You complain of the blatant approval of the cruel repression of women by the author of the fantasy. You find it offensive that Douglas Justice ask is it so bad to have a fantasy world where men and women are separate. I am sad and confused by such comments.

"When you advocate censorship of the Gor novels you are condoning the repression of literature. The printed word has throughout history been the champion of freedom. Why do you turn on books so? Please don't burn any more books. If you choose to create a category of written works called pornography fine, but don't infringe on the right of those works to be read.

"If an author creates a world that you find offensive and dangerous maybe he has done you a favor. You have a chance to see a terror in black and white, a warning to avoid any circumstance that would allow that terror to pop into reality in flesh and gore tones. My observations have been that individuals who promote censorship do not know how to read. I mean, they know all the sound symbols and the objects that arrangements of the sound symbols represent, which makes them quite capable of reading a chemistry book or a camping manual, but when it comes right down to reading good (or fair or poor) fiction or poetry they just have not been taught to read through to the implications of the work in parts or as a whole. Censors seem to read for content, not intent, or unintended implications. Fantasy was once rejected by good readers (self appointed egoists) for having content only. Now that fantasy is accepted as having intent as well it is sad that readers are still reading for content only.

"So what good could the intent of the Gor novels be? Maybe, and I do mean just maybe, the author wanted you to hate him. Maybe he wants you to see his fantasy and say to yourself 'My God that's awful.' Then maybe he wants you to say 'God, the author approves. There are actually people on earth that would enjoy that fantasy.' Suddenly, shazzam, and you are struck by another awful reality. People aren't all nice. The author has put you on guard against baddies.

"As for Douglas Justice's comment. Remember that 100 years ago we didn't have women machinists. Women were slaves to the men of western society good only to have children. Victorian males considered female orgasm a myth not worth joking about.

"The censors still can say that the Gor novels are hardcore porn and underserving the interpretation I recommend. They may say that they don't fit into the erotic reality category of sex. I would point out that a squeezer is far from reality to me. Society does not help the individual get his rocks off. Instead society bonds and whips and rapes individuals like men do the women in the Gor novels. The Gor novels better symbolize western society than the squeezer does. I consider porn fact, erotica art. I don't find the squeezer to be either.

(cont. on page 128)

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Avram Davidson made his most recent appearances in these pages with two of the Enquiries of Doctor Eszterhazy, "The Case of the Mother-in-Law-of-Pearl" (October, 1975) and "The Church of Saint Satan and Pandaemons" (December, 1965). He returns with a realistic novella about current-day British Hidalgo and the timeless—

BLOODY MAN

AVRAM DAVIDSON

"YES, Mr. Limekiller," said old Archbishop Le Beau. Having acknowledged Jack's self-introduction with politeness, he now returned to his task of scaling fish. Some were still on the block and some were in the basket, ready for the pot. A time there was (and a place) when archbishops moved before a train of state. But not this archbishop, in this time, in this place—to wit, Point Pleasaunce, in the sub-tropical colony of British Hidalgo.

"They tell me . . ." Limekiller hesitated, briefly. Was it *My Lord*? *Your Lordship*? Or was it . . . it was. wasn't it . . . *Your Grace?*

Some saints levitate. Some are telepathic. It was widely said and widely believed that William Constance Christian Le Beau was a saint. "Just 'Archbishop' will do, Mr. Limekiller," the old man said, without looking up. *Scrip . . . scrop . . . scrip. . . .* Jack found himself looking covertly around. Perhaps for loaves.

"Ah . . . thank you, sir . . . Archbishop. . . . they tell me that I might be able to pick up a charter for my boat. Moving building supplies, I understand. Down to Curasow Cove? For a bungalow you want built?"

Flop went the fish into the basket.

"Something of the sort, Mr. Limekiller. The bungalow is not for me, you know. I already have a bungalow. It is for my brother Poona."

Jack blinked a bit at this, to him, Bomba-the-Jungle-Boy note. But it was soon cleared up. The retired Anglican Bishop of Poona, in India, had reached an age when he found English winters increasingly difficult. The Mediterannean, where retired British bishops had once been as thick as alewives, had for some long time been in the process of becoming too expensive for anyone who did not happen to own a fleet of oil-tankers. . . .which, somehow, very few retired bishops did. And so this one had—perhaps after fasting, mediation and prayer, perhaps on the spur of the moment—written to his ecclesiastical associate, the Most Reverend W.C.C. Le Beau, Archbishop emeritus (or whatever) of the Province of Central America and Darien—smallest Province in the Anglican Church—asking for advice.

"And I advised him to consider

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

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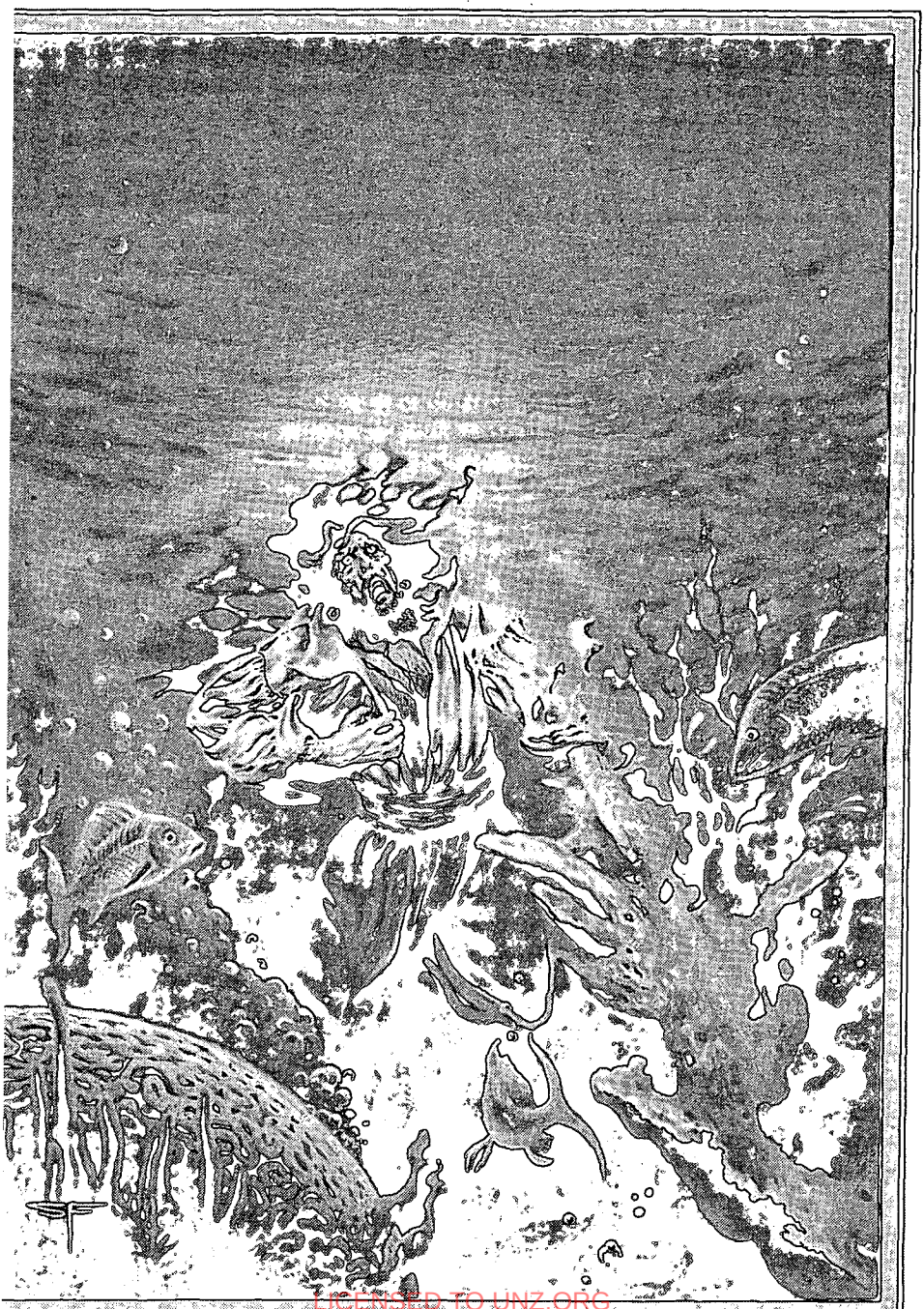

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Curasow Cove. The climate is salubrious, the breeze seldom fails, the water is deep enough to—well, well, I don't wish to sound like a land agent. Furthermore, English in one form or another is the language of the land. To be sure, Poona speaks Hindi and Gujerathi and a few others of the sort: 'precious' lot of good that would do him in Sicily or Spain." *Scrip. . . . scrop. . . flop!*

It was desired to enable the retired Bishop to move into his new home before very long. ("Just let him get a roof over his head and a floor beneath his feet, and that will give him the chance to see if it serves him well enough for his taste. If it does, he can have his furniture, his Indian things and all the rest of it sent over. If not, well, 'The world is wondrous large, leagues and leagues from marge to marge.' ") Ordinarily, there were enough boats, Lord knows, and enough boatmen, at Point Pleasaunce, that lovely and aptly-named little peninsula, to have moved material enough for several bungalows at a time.

But the present season was not an ordinary one.

Every serviceable vessel from the Point, as well as most of those available from other parts of the colony—those not already committed to the seasonal fisheries or to the movement of sand or fruit: and, in fact, so many, even, of those, that both commodities were soon likely to be in short supply—were busy plying between King Town and Plum Tree Creek. There was no road to speak of into the Plum Tree Creek country, one was in the building, but the Canadian-American corporation setting up the turpentine and resin plant at the headwaters of the creek, which thrust so deep into the piney woods that it might better perhaps have been called Pine Tree Creek—the corporation was of no mind to wait. Hence, a constant line of boats, some pure sail, some pure motor, some sail and auxiliary engine, moved along the coast carrying machinery, gasoline, fuel oil, timber, cement, metal-ware, food: and, empty, moved back up the coast for more.

As a non-National, Limekiller stood no chance of a crack at this lucrative commerce as long as any National-owned vessel was available. However, as a citizen of a Commonwealth country—to wit, Canada—he did stand some chance of a permit to take a charter for this other and infinitely smaller project. The greater the interest the archbishop might take in his doing so, the greater his chances of getting it. And well the archbishop knew it.

The kitchen, like every other country kitchen in the Out-Districts (which was any and every district save that of King Town, Urban), consisted of a fire in the yard behind the house in good weather, and underneath the house, in bad. Every house not a trash house stood on high legs to catch the breeze and baffle . . . or, anyway. . . . slow down . . . the entry of the less desirable fauna. The archbishop scarcely had to stoop to peer into the cook-pot as he added to the fish some tinned milk, sliced vegetables, country herbs and peppers; though certainly he had once been tall. Whilst it was cooking, the old man without further word retired to the tiny chapel, its doors wide open, where he knelt before the altar. Limekiller did not join him, but others did: old (the very old), lame (the very lame), some partly, some al-

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together blind, and a few quite small children who, Limekiller thought, may have been orphans. There were an even dozen of them, besides the old priest himself. They were still there when Limekiller returned from a long walk.

With no more word than at the beginning, the old man got up, and, followed by his congregation, made ready to eat the supper: a gesture sufficed to invite the newcomer.

Afterward he wrote out and handed over a paper.

The Permanent Under-secretary
Honorable:

Pray help Mr. John Limekiller help me to help the Lord Bishop.

Yrs in Christ,
William C.A. Darien

"I trust that may do it," said Archbishop Le Beau.

Jack thought it certainly would may. British Hidalgo was, and its people believed it was, and announced on every occasion that it was, *"a Christian country."* Limekiller rather thought the brief document would easily serve as neck-verse, should he commit manslaughter upon ten Turkish merchants.

BUT THOUGH the letter moved the Permanent Under-secretary to initial and stamp it with no more delay than it took him to do those two things and to murmur, "Certainly . . . Certainly . . ."—lining up the supplies was another thing entirely.

Joe Jefferson, at the woodyard, said, "Well, Jock, as you come in the name of the Chorch, I won't lahf in your face. Ahl I can do is to tell you, Impossible. We have twenty men in the bush now, cutting stick for us as fahst as can be cut. Even if you'd take it green, Jock, even if you would take it *green*—no, mon, Jock. Me waiting list—"

"Pine Tree Creek?"

"Pine Tree Creek."

And Velasquez, in his dusty warehouse at the wharf's edge, did no more than shrug, shake his head, point. Where, usually, sacks of cement were piled almost to the ceiling, now only a scant score or so sat on the floor. "And they going out in the marning," he said.

"Pine Tree Creek, I suppose."

A deep nod. No more.

And Witherington, the White Jamaican at the hardware house, "I couldn't give you a nail, b'y, fah me own cahfin! *No* corrugated iron! *No* pipe! *No* screw! Pine Tree Creek project wipe me clean, me b'y! I am waiting now for goods to come in from Kingston. And, as soon as the ship comes in, you know where the goods going to go?"

"Let me guess, Mr. Witherington. Pine Tree Creek?"

Witherington's answer was to throw up both arms and to cry, "Hallelujah!"

There hadn't been such shortages in King Town since the War; on the other hand, there hadn't been such prosperity since Prohibition had been repealed in the United States, bringing rum-running to an end.

However, puissant and powerful though Hector Manufacturing Company, of Pittsburgh, Pa. and Sudbury, Ontario, was, there was evidently a thing or two which it didn't know. Its compradors, flying back and forth between three countries, had assumed that the leading suppliers in a capital city, even a colonial capital city, even of a small colony, would be well-stocked with supply. Perhaps at one

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time this had been true. Perhaps even fifty years ago, when some of the ancient English and Scottish families had still been in business, it might have been true. But, one by one, the Depression had closed their doors. One by one they had closed up their old houses on the Foreshore, and vanished away. The declining trade in precious tropical woods—mahogany, rosewood, cedar—had shrunken the colonial purse. Levantine merchants (commonly called "Turks") had come in, and Chinese, too; Baymen had set up in business; and so had more than one or two with (to employ the American expression) "Spanish surnames." The old order changeth—right? And, so, suddenly, did the old order of the weather.

In the whole of the nineteenth century, only two hurricanes had struck British Hidalgo. In the past thirty years, it had been struck by five. And after one's stock had been washed away once . . . twice . . . three times . . . . one feels a certain hesitancy in building it up again.

It might, indeed, it would certainly have been possible to have set up warehouses in the Out-District capital town of Saint Frances of the Mountains, thirty miles from the coast: and to have filled orders from there in less than a day. But no one did that. No one at all did that. Perhaps the idea of the cost of shipping goods sixty miles did not appeal. Perhaps . . . . Ah, well, What was done, instead, was to keep on hand as small a stock as possible. And if an order for more than one had in stock was received, one of course took the order . . . . took an advance against the full payment for the order . . . and then one ordered the balance of the order . . . From Jamaica, perhaps. From New Orleans. From Puerto Cortes, "in republican waters." Even from London.

And when the "next few days" or "the next week or so" arrived, and no supply, what then? Well, for one thing, the customer could wait, he could bloody well wait, returning day after day to hear what ever imaginative account the local supplier chose to supply him with—

"Beeg strike in Leevah*pool*, sah."

"Ahl de American ship tronsfer to *Veet* Nom, sah."

"We cable Jahmaicah, sah. We waiting reply, sah."

"Sah-*mill* break *down*, sah. Sending to Nicaragua fah new sah, sah."

—not seldom the customer simply returned to wherever he had come from, never to come back—never, to his sorrow, having heard or assimilated the saying which even Cervantes had known: *He who would carry the wealth of the Indies back with him, must carry the wealth of the Indies out with him.*

And, in such cases, the goods ordered eventually arriving, there they were, making such a brave display as to assure the next customer that all was well.

The next customer, in this case, being the Hector Manufacturing Company of Pittsburgh, Pa. and Sudbury, Ont.

Hector had made agreements with every supplier in King Town, and had ignored every supplier in the rest of the country. Hector was being supplied, it was still being supplied, one large cargo ship could have carried off everything in every warehouse in King Town down to Pine Tree Creek. However, no large cargo ship could get closer to King Town than two miles off-shore,

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whence cargo was lightered in—transferred, that is, to motor-barge. And it was thus impossible for any large or even moderate-sized cargo ship to engage in the coastal trade. So Hector's cargo came down little by little, but it came in such a steady procession that Hector had not realized what was coming next.

To whit, and for quite a while: nothing.

In the meanwhile, that was exactly what Jack Limekiller was able to aquire in King Town.

Nothing.

He came up with the notion that he might at any rate try and see if things might be any better in Port Caroline. He even had the very get-up-and-go notion that he would actually telephone Port Caroline. That is to say, Port Caroline not being a person, it could not itself be telephoned: but he would phone some of the leading merchants in that other Out-District capital.

Very little research sufficed to advise him that none of them had a telephone. Not one. Not a single one. Supposedly, if any of the leading businessmen in Port Caroline required to phone someone of an equal status in, say, King Town, he simply walked down the street to the Telephone Office, in an out-building adjacent to the Post Office, and phoned from there. Cheaper to buy milk than to keep a cow, eh, Jack?

Well, there *was* the Royal Telegraphy. Her Majesty's Government did not exactly go to much effort to advertise the fact that there was, but Limekiller had somehow found the fact out. The service was located in two bare rooms upstairs off an alley near the old Rice Mill Wharf, where an elderly gentleman wrote down incoming messages in a truly beautiful Spencerian hand. . . . or maybe it was Copperplate. . . . or Chancery. . . . or Volapük. What the Hell. It was beautiful. It was, in fact, so beautiful that it seemed cavalier to complain that the elderly gentleman was exceedingly deaf, and that, perhaps in consequence, his messages did not always make the most perfect sense.

Gambling that the same conditions did not obtain at the Royal Telegraphy Office in Port Caroline, Limekiller sent off several wires, advising the Carolinian entrepreneurs what he wanted to buy, and that he was coming in person to buy it.

"How soon will these go off?" he asked the aged telegrapher.

"Yes, that is what I heard myself, sir. They say the estate is settle, sir. After ahl these years." And he shook his head and he smiled a gentle smile of wonder.

Limekiller smiled back. What the Hell. What the Hell. What the *Hell*. He waved a goodbye and went downstairs. "The estate," that was, of course, the Estate of Gerald Phillip Washburne, reputedly a millionaire in dollars, pounds, *pesos*, *lempira*, *quetzales*, and who knows what: the estate had been in litigation for decades, and, as regularly as the changes of the moon, it was reported settled. The case was like something out of Dickens. . . . and so, for that matter, was the Royal Telegraphy Office.

Downstairs, suddenly, it all seemed futile. He leaned against the side of the building. Why not just say, The Hell With It: and go meekly back home and try for a nice, safe, low-paid, pensionable job with the Hudson's Bay Company? He would only have to counterfeit a Scotch accent,

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and that suddenly seemed so much simpler than all this. The early evening breeze sprang up and blew a piece of the local newspaper against his legs. He reached down to detach it, picked it up, automatically glanced at it. *WANTED* [an advertisement read] *One watch dog that gets vexed easily and barks and bites.*

"*I* might apply for that job," he said, to himself. Then he burst out laughing.

What the Hell?

THE WATERS around Port Caroline were on the shallow side—in Baytalk, the dialect of the Bayfolk—"shoally." A pier jutted out into deeper water about two miles from town, and here the packet-boats made their stops: the *Hidalgo* twice a week, the *Miskitian* once a week, and the *Bayan* according to Captain Cumberbatch's mind, pocket, or bowels. ("De sahlt wahtah bind me up, b'y," he had observed to Jack.) Most of the Port's own vessels preferred to put in at the mouth of Caroline Creek itself, which ran right through the middle of town. As there had been a bar building at the mouth of the creek for almost half a century, these vessels tended to be very shallow-draft vessels, indeed: even so, getting them across the bar was often a matter of tide, wind, and many willing bodies to heave and haul. It may not have been efficient. But it was companionable.

Limekiller had made the personal aquaintance of a rock just far enough from the pier to be free from mooring fees, and, with some degree of diligence, dropped his anchor at the proper angle to it. He didn't bother with the skiff, and was wading ashore, his shirt up under his armpits and his trousers draped around his shoulders, when a voice cried, "Have you no shame, sir: wearing nothing but that. . . . that tobacco pouch!—in the presence of Her Majesty's proconsul?"

Jack knew that voice, called in its direction: "Unless an indictment for *lèse majesté* is involved, Her Majesty's proconsul can either wait till I'm ashore, or look somewhere else. Sir," he added.

"Haw Haw!" was the answer of H.M. proconsul, videlicet the Royal Governor, Sir Joshua Cummings. The day had passed, perhaps fortunately, when colonial governors were appointed from the ranks of old generals who with lance and sabre had struck terror (or perhaps joy) into the hearts of contumacious Hill Tribesmen on distant Asian frontiers: Sir Joshua had been a sailor. No man-of-war larger than a gunboat, probably, could nowadays enter the shallow and coral-studded waters of the Inner Bay—but the Bayfolk, and, for that matter, the other Nationals of the Colony—had no interest in how well or how ill their governor might have manoeuvered a destroyer: they observed with great interest, however, how their governor managed sloop or schooner (or even skiff, dingy, or launch): their conclusion was, "No bod, mon, you know. Not bod ah-tahl." Stout, white-bearded, jovial, in his ceremonial white uniform, his white helmet with white plumes, Sir Joshua made a fine appearance at such occasions as the opening of the Legislative Council or the Court Sessions or the observance of the Sovereign's birthday. The Bayfolk enjoyed seeing him at that. Nevertheless it was likely that they appreciated seeing him even more in his sea-faded khakies, at the tiller of his sailing-launch for the opening of the annual regatta—in

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which, of course, he did not compete.

Still, the Bayfolk, who numbered eighty percent of the people of the Colony, and who were for the most part Black, had mixed feelings about it all. On the one hand, they would have really preferred a governor who was Black; on the other hand, they had a feeling that a governor who was Black was not really a governor at all. And sooner or later these feelings would have to be resolved. But not just yet. Time, as we are incessantly reminded, does not stand still. But in the Colony of British Hidalgo it was still standing as near to still as anywhere.

"There. Now that you are decent once more, allow me to offer you a drop . . . a lift, I believe they call it in North America. *Thought* I recognized your boat. Thought I'd just wait a bit for the pleasure of your company." H.E. the Governor was in what the Bayfolk called "De R'yal Jeep;" actually, it was a small Land Rover which flew a small Union Jack in place of a licence plate. "*And* what brings you down to this friendly little port named after Old Snuffy? Eh? Oh. Didn't know Queen Caroline took snuff? Course she did. Up to her *ears* in the stuff, silly old cow. Or was that Queen Charlotte? *I* can't keep them straight. Eh?"

Jack knew this last *eh?* was not a reference to the queens of the House of Hanover, but a friendly reminder that a question had been asked and not answered. "I'm trying to locate building supplies for a bungalow for the Bishop of Simla. . . . I think."

Sir Joshua, who had been driving on the left, now shifted to the right. On the back roads, one drove where the fewest pot-holes were. "Oh yes. Simla? No, no. Poona. Bishops, bishops, bishops, eh, Mr. Limekiller? There's the regular bishop, the regular Anglican Bishop of Hidalgo; then there's the RC Bishop of King Town; then of course there is dear old Archbishop Le Beau, *quite* a compliment for him to have picked *us* to settle amongst. And now this one. Thought I'd try it on our regular bishop, 'What do you think of all these incoming episcopies?' I asked. Thought I'd goad him into some expression of jealousy, then I'd taunt him with a lack of, oh, well, *something*, you know. All he said was, 'The more the merrier.' There you are, never *can* trust these parsons . . . . . Damnable stretch of road, remind me to make a note of it, drop a hint to the Ministry."

Coconut walks lined the land side of the road. Sluggish and frothy waves slopped lazily along the beach. Overhead, though not very much overhead, brown pelicans languidly flopped through the heavy air. "And you, Sir Joshua? Are you out here investigating reports that someone has been poaching the Queen's Deer?"

An animal far too large for a pig and far too small for a cow ambled out of the bush, narrowly avoided making a deodand of the Royal Jeep, ambled back. The chief function of the tapir, that odd, *odd*, animal, seemed to be to cause just exactly such hazards on the back roads. Jack was sure that he had heard Sir Joshua utter the words, "Bloody man," at just the second the "mountain-cow" made its unsought epiphany. But he thought it best not to repeat the question. Perhaps the phrase was directed towards himself. Perhaps he had Presumed. Sir Joshua was a kindly older gentleman, Sir Joshua was being amiable in giving him a ride: Sir Joshua was, after all,

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he *was* the Royal Governor, and so—

"The damndest things, Jack, bring me out to the damndest places. It isn't all cutting ribbons for new bridges and signing pardons, you know. Here I am, supposed to be trying my best to phase myself *out*, you know. . . . and then, again and again, Government tries to phase me *in*. However. Mum's the word—Wish it *were* the Queen's Deer!"

IF HE HAD had any small thoughts that perhaps arriving in the Royal Barge might give a certain cachet, a position of advantage to his business here in town, the sight of every place of business closed for lunch-cum-siesta put an end to them. He thanked Sir Joshua, and left him to his reception at the local District Commissioner's or Police Superintendant's office—they were side by side in the one building. The next building was the Post Office: of course it, too, was closed. Much to his surprise, however, the door of the Telegraphy Office adjacent opened, and in the doorway appeared Mr. Horatio Estaban, the (local) Royal Telegrapher. "Mr. Limekiller, sir!"

"Hello, Mr. Estaban."

"Mr. Limekiller, sir, as I am just now going home to take my luncheon. As I suppose you are heading for down-town. If you would oblige us by distributing these, if you wouldn't mind, sir," and he held out a number of envelopes.

"No, I wouldn't mind," Limekiller said, scanning the addresses, all of which were familiar to him. "But aren't they all closed now?"

Mr. Estaban, already headed in the direction of his luncheon, said, over his shoulder, "They must open by and by, sir. —At your own leisure and convenience, Mr. Limekiller. Thank you so."

The reason why the names and addresses on the telegram envelopes were all familiar to him was that they were all of the local suppliers to whom he had the day before sent telegrams.

And, in fact, as he very justly suspected, the envelopes contained the very telegrams which he had sent.

SHOP AFTER shop presented closed doors to him as he walked along the shore road beneath the jacaranda trees which had covered the sand with their purple blossoms. True: the establishment of Abdullah Ah Ko was open, that is, its door was open, but Abdullah Ah Ko himself was fast asleep in a chair set just far enough back out of the sun so that no one could enter without climbing right over him: and, anyway, industrious and estimable person that Abdullah Ah Ko was, his stock, ranging from black tobacco-leaf to plastic raincoats, contained nothing of any use in the way of building supplies.

One place of trade and commerce was open, wide open, anyway as wide open as its swinging doors allowed of: and that was The Fisherman Wharf, LICENSED TO SELL, etc., etc.

Proprietor, and even now behind the bar of The Fisherman Wharf, was the justly-famous Lemuel Piggott, sole perpetuator of the grand tradition of the shandygaff. He acknowledged Jack's entrance with a nod—the current volume of sound inside The Wharf made this the most sensible method of communication—and reached down a tall, clean glass. From one cooler he got out a glistening black bottle of Tennant's Milk Stout, from another he extracted a glis-

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tening green bottle of Excelsior Ginger Stout; he opened first one, then the other: then, with infinite dexterity, he poured them both simultaneously, one from each hand, into the one glass.

By this time Jack had bellied up to the bar. Piggott waited until the new customer had become the better by several gills of the lovely mixture before asking the traditional, "Hoew de day, mon?"

Limekiller had scarcely time to make the traditional reply of, "Bless God," when the man at his right, addressing either nobody or everybody, continued—evidently—a discourse interupted by the last arrival's arrival.

"An' one day, *me* see some-teeng, mon, *me* see some-teeng hawreed. Me di *see* eet, mon. Me di *see* di bloody mon—"

"Hush up you mout'," said Piggott.

But the other, a much older fellow, did not hear, perhaps, or did not care, perhaps. "Me di see di blood-dee mon. Me di see he, ah White-MON, ahl cot een pieces ahn ahl blood-dee. Wahn, two, t'ree, de pieces ahv heem dey ahl come to*ged*-dah. De mon stahn op befah me, mon. He stahn ahp befah me. Ahl bot wahn piece, mon. He no hahv wahn piece een he side, mon. He side *gape*, mon, gape wo pen. Eet *bleed*, mon. Eet BLEED!"

And now other faces than the proprietor's were turned to the narrator. "Hush up you *mout'*, mon!" other voices said, gruff.

Brown man, glass of brown rum in his brown hand. Sweat on his face. Voice rising. "Ahn so me di *know*, mon. Me di know *who* eet ees, mon. Eet ees de blood-dee *Cop*-tain. Eet ees Cop-tain *Blood*!"

Brown man spun around by another Brown man. Brown fist shaken in brown face. "Me say, 'Hush you mout', mon!' Ah else, me gweyn mahsh eet shut fah you—you hyeah?" And a shove which spins the other almost off his balance, careening against the bar. But not spilling the drink. First man saying nothing. Shaking. Sweating.

Limekiller had seen the D.T.s before. Thank God, he had never had them yet. And did not plan to.

He suddenly became aware of a scientific fact: that no one who confined himself to shandygaff could possibly get the D.T.s. Calcium in the milk stout and essential oils in the ginger stout would prevent it. Probably prevent scurvy, too, as well as whitlows, felons, proud flesh, catarrh, apoplexy, cachexy, and many another ailment of the eighteenth century.

Which seemed to be the century, at the latest, which he was now living in. Captain Blood, hey? Whoopee.

It was not yet time for the Port Caroline commercial establishment to resume its not-quite-incessant labors. It was time, therefore, for another shandygaff.

The place at his side was now taken up by someone else. Well, the bar was long, the bar was said to be made of rosewood and mahogany: and, if so, it must date from days when Port Caroline enjoyed more activity than Port Caroline did today and had done these forty (at least) years: before the Panama Disease destroyed the bananas and the banana trade. Before cutting without replanting had destroyed the timber trade. Before the building up of the sand bar at the mouth of the Caroline Creek put an end to the carrying-trade with the whole of the Great Central Valley. Before—

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Ah well. Port Caroline Town was after all only one of the many places, all over the world, of which it could be said that it had a great future behind it.

Somebody was next to him at the bar. He felt, Limekiller felt, that the someone next to him at the bar was wanting to talk to him. He would have checked this new bar-neighbor out in the mirror, except that he was facing a well-laid design several feet long by several feet tall of bottles, climbing the wedding-cake-like carven shelves. So, he could either snob it out by not turning to look, or he could risk the chance that the man next to him either did not really want to talk to him, or was maybe wanting to talk unpleasant talk to him: though this, to be sure, seldom happened: But the fact was: some people simply did not want to be looked at.

The matter was almost at once resolved. "Scuse me, sah, you doesn't mind I ox you ah question?"

It was now permissable to turn and look. The same fisherman who had spin-dizzied the other fisherman. Not, however, seeming inclined to repeat it with Jack. "Fire away, friend," said J.

"What you t'ink, sah, ahv de Ahrah*wock*?"

A few years earlier, this question asked him in North America, Jack would have at once said, "The Arawack are extinct." And, as far as North America is concerned, the Arawack *are* extinct. In Central America, however, not necessarily. Limekiller said, perhaps cautiously, but, certainly, truthfully, "Well, they have never bothered me . . ."

This was perhaps not what the man meant. The Fisherman Wharf, Jack recollected, was not, after all, an Arawack bar, it was a Bayman bar.. The Arawack for the most part lived farther south, in a string of tiny coastal hamlets, many of which, oddly enough, had Scotch names: Aberdeen, Inverclyde, Mull, and others.

The fisherman said, "Mon, what I mean to ox, dey Block like we, nah true, sah? Nah true, dey Block like we? Some of dem, dey blocker dan some of we. Why dey no like ahd meet dey Block like we? Suppose, sah, you say to dem, 'What, you no Block? You not Nee-*gro*?' You not know, sah, what dey ahnswer? 'No sotch teeng,' dey say. 'Notteeng like dot. We Eendian,' dey gweyn tell you. Dey not want fi speak Bay*tahk*. Dey w'only want fi speak dey w'own lahnguage, sah, which dey not want teach noo-*bod*-dy. Ahnd wot de troot, sah? De troot ees, dey mustee."

Jack didn't know the word, his face showed it.

The fisherman, seeing that, explained. " 'Mustee,' sah, what we cahl mustee, eet mean, meex. Wheech ees to say, dey ahv meex race. Yes sah. Block men from Africa, lahng, lahng time w'ago, dey meexing wit' de w'old Ahrawock Eendian een de West Eedies, sah. Dey loosing de African lahnguage, sah. Becahs, sah, dese w'old-time Africa men, sah,. coming from many deeferent tribe, sah, no common tongue, sah: and meengling weet de Ahrawock Eendian, dey adop de Ahrawock tongue. De Eendian become Block, de Block becoming Eendian. Ahftah while, sah, mi-*grat*-ing from de West Eendies. Settling *here*, sah."

Still cautious, Limekiller said, "Yes, I believe you are correct." A curious people, the Black Arawack.. A mystery people, sure enough, with their black skins and their Indian faces and their

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archaic and (save of course to themselves) their unknown language. Mysterious, but certainly harmless. Harmless, certainly—but different. Harmlessly different, but—still—*different.*

"Yes, sah," the fisherman said. "Dey settle here, Enn Breeteesh Heedalgo. But sah. *We settle here forst . . .*"

IT HAD BEEN a fairly faint and fairly forlorn hope which had brought Jack down to Port Caroline. As far as imported goods were concerned, merchants and suppliers there did not order from abroad: they ordered from King Town. There did not seem to be any more stock in their warehouses than in the capital (and only) city: however. None of them had ever studied Business Administration at Harvard. Their ways of administering business would have flunked not only any test administered in North America, they would probably have failed any Mexican examination as well. But their ways were their own ways and they knew their own country . . . knew, certainly, their own local District and their district's ways.

Wilbur Velasquez, Hardware and Ironmonger, does not depose, but says: Yes, Jock, I does hahv dot amoent ahv roofing metal [corrugated iron]. Yes, Jock, I weel sell eet to de bee-shup, sortainly. Noew, Jock, de w'only problem: Hoew we go-een get eet doewn from Mt. Maria?

Ascander Haddad, Dealer in Ground Victuals, Citrus Fruits, Cement: Well, Mr. Limekiller, as it is for the church, very well, Mr. Limekiller. I have three sack of cement, store at my farm at Mile 23. I have another sack in the shed at my other house at Bendy Creek. Suppose you can find some way of bringing them down, you can have them at same price.

Gladstone Lionel Piggott, Lumber Contractor and Dealer in Wood, Timber, and Planks: Me b'y, I be delighted to help you. Motta ahv foct, ahlthough I do not hahv your requirement directly at hond, not here in Port, I hahv a pile ahv season timber exoctly cot fah your need. Some five year ago I dismontle sah-*mill* doewn aht Bamboo P'int, but timber still pile ahp, ahnd nicely season by noew, you see.

It all made sense, it made, all of it, excellent sense. Wilbur Velasquez had moved the corrugated iron to Mt. Maria because, at the time he had moved it, people were roofing houses at Mt. Maria. The cultivators there were cultivators in a small way, they were of a thrifty disposition, they straightened nails as long as there were bent nails to straighten; and they bought sheets of corrugated iron as they had money to spare to buy them. One by one. Sheet by sheet. It would not have paid Wilbur to have moved the material sheet by sheet from Port Caroline, so he had moved it en masse, and erected a *ramada* to cover it. Since that time, however, there had been a decline in the price of bananas, and, as a result, no one now at Mt. Maria was buying corrugated iron. And, as Wilbur did not know who would want it next, or where, or how much—being (as he more than once pointed out) neither a prophet nor a prophet's son—he had simply . . . and sensibly . . . left it where it was.

Ascander Haddad had cement in sack at his two properties because he sometimes required cement at his two properties. Moreover, his neighbors,

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did *they* require cement, and from time to time they did, would certainly find it more convenient to buy it by the bucket right there at Mile 23 or at Bendy Creek, rather than come down to Port for it. It was not news to Ascander that no fresh supply was coming soon from King Town, but that was no reason why he should have moved such supply as he had from right where it was.

And Gladdy Piggott, cousin to Lemuel, like every small lumberman in the colony, followed the age-old practice of moving the saw-mill—or, exactly, its machinery—from cut-over site to un-cut-over site, every few years or so. His present machinery was standing idle back at St. Austin's Range, because, for one, he had not felt like bidding for the most recently offered Government contract; and, for another, because most of his sawyers had moved on to Pine Tree Creek, formerly Plum Tree Creek. And, as for the cut timber left over at the old mill at Bamboo Point, why, that was safe enough there, it was even getting seasoned there. It was like money in the bank, there.

Paint, now. There was some paint of the sort wanted, in Port Caroline. Not enough. There was enough to make enough, though, at the Forestry Station in Warree Bush—where, no one knew why, more had arrived than had been ordered, last year: and had of course stayed there ever since. Why not? It was perfectly-safe there. If someone were to require it . . . someday . . . well . . .

And so on. And so on.

Stepping out into the pre-dawn was like stepping into a clean, cool pool. Already, at that hour, people were about . . . grave, silent, polite. . . . the baker setting the fires, the fisherman already returning with their small catch. The sun climbed, very tentatively, to the edge of the horizon. For a moment, it hesitated. Then, all at once, two things happened. The national radio system, which had gone off the air at ten the night before, suddenly awoke into Sound. Radios were either dead silent or at full-shout. In one instant, every radio in Port Caroline, and in the greater Port Caroline Area, roared into life. And at the same moment, the sun, suddenly aware that there was nothing to oppose it, shot up from the sea and smote the land with a blast of heat.

Trucks began to roar and rattle along the rutted roads, past the bending coconut palms, past the golden-plum trees whose fruit was never suffered to become ripe, lest the worms get at it, crushing under their wheels the violet flowers of the jacarandas. But these were either Government trucks or else the trucks of the Citrus Company: it made no difference to them what supplies Jack Limekiller wanted. And as to the privately-owned trucks, well. . . .

"Well, sah. Mile 23? Well, sah. Me nevah go pahss Mile Ten, sah. Pahss dot p'int, sah, not ee-nahf business warrant de treep, de time, de gahs, sah."

Ascander Haddad, who had the two or three sacks of cement at his house there, made the trip daily. But he made it in the smallest motor vehicle in all of British Hidalgo: and he made it with his widowed sister, who acted as his secretary-treasurer, and who was the largest woman in all of British Hidalgo. There was not even room for a bag of corn-starch, let alone sacks of cement.

Mount Maria? People lived at Mt.

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Maria; they were not recluses, not hermits, they came to Port, didn't they? They transported things back, didn't they? Yes. Yes, they did. And they did it according to a twice-monthly schedule involving the Mt. Maria Bethlehem Church and the Mt. Maria Bethlehem Church Vehicle (it surely rated a capital letter, being always referred to as "De Vehicle"). However, attend: Firstly, the twice-monthly trip of The Vehicle had just occurred. Secondly, the or The Vehicle had gone back to St. Frances of the Mountain for its annual overhaul.

There were rumors of mules, of ox-carts, or of horse-drawn drays. People assured Limekiller that they had seen them. But, then, people assured Limekiller that they had seen Jesus, too.

And so, speaking of *which*—

Or, rather . . . Whom.

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH in Port Caroline, a fortress—for the most part—of old-time Methodism, was very, very small, and very, very white. Father Nollekens, on the other hand, though also very, very small, was very, very black. He was not a native of the colony, he had been born in Barbados, and educated at Coddrington College, that ancient (and, incidentally, also Anglican) foundation there.

"Why, yes, Mr. Limekiller. I had word from His Grace that you might be around. You are having difficulties in gathering the building supplies for *His Lordship's bungalow.*" These were not questions, they were statements. "Now suppose that you give me a list of the places which you will need to visit. And we will inform you." Father Nollekens did not say of what they would inform him

"Well, thank you, Father. Let's see, I will be . . . I will be . . "

Father Nollekens waves his small hand. "Oh, do not concern yourself, sir. We will find you."

Jack waited until he was outside before he shrugged.

He was moodily loading up on the fish-tea and country peppers at the My Dream Restaurant, Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Proprietors, when a heavy-set man whom he recognized as Peter Bennetson, the trucker, approached, and said, "You muss eat fahster, Mr. Limekiller, as we do has quite a journey to mehk."

Jack blinked. "I thought you don't go beyond Mile Ten."

"Well, sah, tell de trut', seldom does I do so. But when Fahder Nollekens mehk requess, muss obey." Bennetson smiled. Limekiller left a tiny tip, paid for his meal, followed Peter out the door. The truck was enormous, it was not the same one at all which the man had been driving the last time. Had Jack underestimated the powers of the Church of England? "You're an Anglican, then—?"

Bennetson was polite, but he was firm. He was a Catholic, a Roman Catholic. But he was also a member of the local Lodge of the Wise Men of Wales: not only was Rev. Fr. Nollekens also one, but he was also one of the Grand Chaplains of the *Grand* Lodge of the Wise Men of Wales, an organization not previously known to Jack—and perhaps equally unknown to Wales. "Yes, sah. When ah bruddah ahsk, ahl we uddah bruddah muss obey."

It took the whole day, but they got it all, every last bit of it . . .even the seasoned timber from Bamboo Point, which was connected to the known

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world only by what was termed, on the official map, a "Truck Pass'—a term not having anything to do with motor vehicles at all, as many a foreigner had learned the hard way—a truck pass, in Hidalgo, was a trail passable by ox-drawn wagons, of which one or two were rumored to survive, still, in the remoter regions. In the five years since this trail had last been used by anything larger than an iguana, it had been considerably overgrown . . . and, in Hidalgo, overgrowth grew over very, very rapidly. But it all yielded. Sometimes, more easily than others. Fortunately there were three of them; somewhere along the way, on or about Mile 20, they had picked up what would in North America be called a hitch-hiker: here, there was not a name: one simply "hailed" a passing vehicle with a wig-wag motion, the car (or truck) either stopped or didn't; and it was customary for the hailer to ask, at the conclusion, "How much I have for you?" It was customary for the driver to tell him. Limekiller never learned the young man's name—he thought of him as Mile 20—but the young man was a not-so-easy-rider and evidently thought the labor he helped put in was well worth the free trip. . . . to say nothing of the time. . . . but perhaps, without this lift (or "drop") he might have stood back at the milepost all the long, hot day.

The sun was declining behind the green mountain, if not the green sea, when they made their last trip through Port Caroline on route to the pier. Limekiller suggested that they stop at The Fisherman Wharf for a cool drink. No protests were received. Inside the bar-room, its massive arches made in a style of masonry no longer practiced locally (and perhaps nowhere else), a polite degree of polite interest was shown in their day's work and its purpose.

"Eendiahn *bee*-shup going lo-cate een Curasow Cove."

"Very good teeng, mon. Very good teeng."

"Me weesh he ahlready dere *noew!*"

This sentiment, innocuous to Limekiller, seemed freighted with more meaning than was universally welcome; and the man who announced it was several times invited to hush his mouth: and did so.

"Say, that reminds me," Limekiller said, looking up. Many eyes looked at him, waiting politely to hear what he had been reminded of. "I'll need a crew. Say, two men? To help me? There's no pier down there. Help me unload, and so on." There was a slow silence. "Anybody interested?"

Suddenly, no one was looking at him. Much interest was for some reason developed in looking at the large picture of the Queen, whose Royal simper Jack had long found insufferable—until visits into republican waters and their ports, and exposure to the prominently displayed photographs of, instead, sundry scowling generals with fat chests covered by medals, had gradually made Her Majesty, simper and all, look very, very good and innocent in contrast. "Two good men? Usual wages, and all found?"

No takers. Many men closely examining the labels on the bottles behind the bar as though they had never seen them before. To be sure, there was much of interest to label-fanciers, particularly rum bottle label fanciers: but . . . still . . .

Jack turned to the man at his right. "How about you?"

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"Well sah. I like to oblige you. But I muss go to Walker Caye for fetch coconut." The man to Jack's left would equally have liked to oblige him, but had to honor a standing agreement to go dive for crayfish. A number of the bar's patrons simply did not hear the question, and, in fact, a number of them simply left the bar. Peter Bennetson tugged at Jack's sleeve. "Best we be getting on, noew, Jock."

Jack, well aware of the smell of rotten apples, agreed, but he could not resist pausing to ask the tallest man present, as he passed him, "What about *you*?"

This time there was neither politeness nor excuse. The tall man glared at him, growled, "You teenk I om *cra-zy*?" And he turned his back, deliberately, with a toss of his head, and an ugly mutter.

Back in the truck, bumpetty-*bump*-bump along the shore road, Jack asked the trucker, "Now, what was all that about?"

" 'Deed, sah, I doesn't know. I suspec' ahl de men tired frahm lahng day work. Tomorrow you weel doubtless find some crew."

Limekiller turned to the silent young man beside him in the cab of the truck. Mile 20 was still gamely earning his way. "Well, how about *you*, then?"

The lad's voice was low, but it was in no way indistinct.

"*No*, sah!"

Skippy the Cat, the first mate of the *Sacarissa*, announced over the water between boat and dock that several Barbary corsairs had tried to take the sloop for a prize, but had been repelled with immense loss of life.

LIMEKILLER, also tired from the long day's work, slept later than usual. As always, before leaving from the day, he set out food and water for Skippy, a semi-domestic white short-hair, who had lost most of his tail in an encounter with forces unknown, before first meeting Jack. Who, on departing, cautioned him as always, "Keep the ship, now." And the first mate answered, as always, that there was powder and shot a-plenty in the lockers.

This time there was no Royal Jeep waiting at the shore end of the pier, so Limekiller, re-assuming the most of his clothing which he had shucked for the splashing walk ashore, simply picked up his feet and walked. It was barely two miles to the center of Port Caroline Town, a point which he, somewhat arbitarily, designated as the corner on which The Fisherman Wharf was located. The coconut walks ("walks," here, meaning groves) ended rather abruptly where the shore road became a path across an immense field in which a long-ago cleric had pastured his horses: it was still called The Padre's Paddock, but was now used for football, baseball, and cricket. Usually swarms of boys were engaged at play, but this morning: not one. The point where the shore road emerged again as a singularity was marked by a small obelisk topped by an even smaller bust of Queen Victoria.

"Mornin, Ma'am," Jack said, tossing off a sketchy salute. "I am pleased every time I see you, that no one has drawn a moustache on you." And, indeed, no one had: but along the left flank of the obelisk someone had scrawled a pair of intwined hearts and the legend *Dendry Love Betty*. "We are very slightly amused," said Queen

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Victoria.

Would she have been amused to have seen the crowd in front of Government Buildings near the center of town? Probably only in the archiac meaning of the word, as "amazed." Certainly, Jack was amazed. There may have been only a hundred, or a few more, men in the crowd, but for Port Caroline, and on a weekday which was not a holiday, it was an immense throng. Sure enough, the Land Rover of Governor Sir Joshua was there, and, as Jack, standing only slightly on his toes, peered over the heads of those in the street, he caught a glimpse of Sir Joshua. He was with Mr. Simeon Edwards, the soft-spoken Black man who was Superintendant of the Central Police District: both were talking to what was perhaps a delegation of the men outside.

"What's up, friend," Jack asked a man on the outskirts of the crowd.

"Mon, de Ahra*wock* di tehk ahp we feesh-eeng *groend*! Ahn we no gweyn *stond* fah eeet!"

This statement was confirmed and extended by others. Black Arawak fishing-vessels, moving up from the southern waters of the colony, had occupied the traditional in-shore fishing-grounds of the Port Caroline Bayfolk: and it was to protest this violation of ancient custom that the Caroline fishermen were gathered here before the habitation of authority, to wit, Government Buildings. Another peep inside showed the broad face and shoulders of the District Commissioner. D.C. Esequiel Bosco was a man of the utmost integrity. He was also a member of the Black Arawak people.

Limekiller thought it discreet at this point to ask no more questions, but several of the Baymen around him thought it in no way indiscreet to supply him with at least some answers to questions unasked. And these, collectively, were approximately thus:

"Suppose dey [the Black Arawak] stay doewn Sote. Suppose we Bayfolk stay ahp Nart. Dees only lee' beet country, but beeg enough fah bote ahv we. Beeg enough fah bote ahv we, eef we each stays in we w'own place. Even de Bay hahv feesh enough fah feed bote ahv we. But w'only juss enough. Noew, what de arrangement? De arrangement, sah, de w'old custom fah hondred year aht leas', we Bay*folk*, us feesh Nart ahv Pelican P'int, sah, ahn de Ahra*wock*, dey feesh Sote ahv Pelican P'int. Ahn de bess place fah cotch feesh fah we, eet ees hahfway between Pelican P'int narteast t'ards de Scotchmon Cayes. Een fact, eet ees so good een yield feesh, we cahl eet De Garden, sah. We torms eet De Garden Groend.

"—Now, sah. Suppose we sees wahn Ahara*wock* hahv he boat dere. We not say nut-teeng. Suppose we sees two Ahrah*wock* hahv dey boat dere. May-be we grumble lee' beet. But sah. But sah. Consider. Consider. De whole Ahrahwock *fleet*, sah, ahs you might say, ees feesh-eeng dere. Feesh-eeng een oe-ah groend. Well sah. Dey dere forst, we fine dem dere dees marneeng when we arive. Dey stay dere. What we do, we no cotch nah-teeng becahs dey ahlready cotch eet ahl? Hoew we feed, we pickney, sah? Hoew we fine meelk? Bread? Rice ahn bean? Sah, ahl-ways ah struggle, sah: but de Laard provide feesh fah we—"

And, indeed, the waters of the Inner Bay did not exactly teem. "Give us this day our daily fish" would have been a reasonable form of prayer: each day there was just so much fish

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at any given spot. And when that just so much was gone, there wasn't anymore. Not that day.

"Ahn hoew we pay we rent, sah?"

As Limekiller had no answer, he ought to have done no more than shake his head, sympathetically. But he did not think of this. And, entirely without thinking, entirely automatically, he said, "Well. . . . "

It just happened that one of those twenty-minutes-after-the-hour, an-angel-is-flying-overhead, sort of pauses, occurred just then. And so his "*Well . . .*", delivered in an ordinary tone of voice, sounded forth in a manner more declarative. It reached the ears, even, of those inside the front office, who looked up and out. At which, those outside, seized by what Mackay has somewhat prolixly called Extra-ordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds, decided, for one, that though Limekiller was outside, he ought to be inside—and, two, that although he was not a Bayman (not, indeed, a professional fisherman, not even a National of the Colony), he was certainly a boatman: and perhaps also made aware that he was, certainly, White, and, perhaps, since White men were few in Port Caroline and there was no Poor White class there at all—

"Go een, Mr. Limekiller, go een, do, sah, do!"

"Tell dem, Jock, go een ahn tell dem, mon!"

Exactly what he was to tell them was not specified, but they began to push him forward; they pushed him all the way to the very verge of the office, where he did catch hold of the wall-corner—to the Governor, whose face at the moment was not indicative of any great degree of welcome, he said, protestingly, "Sorry, Sir, I have really no idea what this—"

To which Sir Joshua, in voice between grunting and growling, replied, "Well, for God's sake, boy, don't keep on tottering there, like a virgin at a whorehouse door: *Get in!*"

Limekiller released his hold, and was propelled inside of the gates of authority. The crowd sent up a cheer. They had at any rate accomplished *some*thing.

SIR JOSHUA sighed. He had been sighing at intervals. "You ask why, if the Arawak are occupying the northern, or, anyway, the north-central fishing-grounds, why don't the Baymen simply go and occupy the southern fishery? Well, they say it's too far . . . they say it isn't theirs . . . . that it's inconvenient. . . . that they are not familar with it. . . .

"And all of this is true, you know. Mind you, they are not under oath. They are telling the truth, but they're not telling the whole truth . . ." Sir Joshua, however, showed no immediate disposition to tell the whole truth, either, and let that aspect of it drop.

Superintendant Edwards asked, softly, "This. . . . this old agreement, which the people speak of, now—"

"Well," said Sir Joshau, "yes, I do believe that there was some sort of agreement about a division of the coastal waters as far as fishing was concerned. Some sort of treaty, you might call it. I believe my father mentioned it to me, once. He was born here, you know. As to the documents. the records, well. Documents just don't have a way of lasting long in this country's climate. It is just the opposite of Egypt, you know—Copies of the records? Why, they would be in London, I suppose. *If*

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they survived the War. I have cabled an enquiry, but you must remember that this is part of what was once a vast Empire and the accumulation of records was also vast. Why, even if they'd begun with microfilm and electronic computers and all of that the day they'd been invented, it would still take a hundred years—at least—to get it all, er, ah, mm, arranged . . . . that way. I say the documents must be in London, a figure of speech, they might as likely be in an otherwise empty old coal-mine in Wales or a semi-disused guildhall in the Midlands or an unoccupied castle in the Hebrides . . . confound it! in an *occupied* castle in the Hebrides! Superintendant, you have no *idea* what went on over there during the Evacuations. We may never get it all back together again. . . ."

The very clear thought came to Jack that a more immediate problem was getting it all back together right then and there. Unless it was like Humpty-Dumpty. There was an obvious question and he addressed it to the obvious person.

"But why, District Commissioner, *are* the Arawak moving their fishing north . . . and, well, perhaps a better way of putting it would be—Why have they stopped fishing in their old waters in the south?"

Mr. Bosco looked at him with those indescribable, yet unmistakable Arawak eyes. At first he only said, "*Ahhh*. . . ."And then he said, "It is because they are afraid of the Jack O'Lantern."

Limekiller knew at once that he must not laugh, but the effort not to laugh showed. D.C. Bosco said, without resentment, but without embarrassment, "You North Americans, Mr. Limekiller, you think that because you give this name to a carven pumpkin with a candle inside of it, that this is all it means. I do assure you, quite solemnly, that it is not so. Down here in these waters and on these coasts, sir, Jack O'Lantern is taken as serious as Jack Ketch."

Limekiller's mind ran away with sudden, odd, grisly notions. Jack Ketch was the hangman's name . . . or nick-name. . . . *neck*-name? Jack O'Lantern, Jack O'Lantern, I know you of old / You've robbed my poor pockets / Of silver and gold / . . . No, that was Jack O'Diamonds. He did know, though, he knew that he did know. And so he did. Up from the middle-depths of his mind, bending a bit, perhaps, on the way up— "That's the lantern of the ship that isn't there, isn't it? I mean, you see lights and you expect the ship, but no ship comes? I mean, oh, it's St. Elmo's fire, or something. . . . isn't it. . . . the Will o' the Whisp?

"You mean, D.C., that the Arawak are as afraid of an optical illusion as though—"

No sooner had he said it than he was aware that even St. Elmo's Fire was no optical illusion; he remembered Byron's ". . . marshes' meteor-lamp, . . . creeping onward, through the damp. . . ."He was prepared for reproof. He was not prepared for what he heard next.

"The Arawak do not— That is, you see, Mr. Limekiller: Jack O'Lantern, this is the Bayfolks' name for it. The Arawak do not in their own speech call it that."

Limekiller gave his head a faint shake. "They don't. They *don't*? Oh. Well, uh, what do they call it, then? If not Jack O'Lantern?"

"Call it, Jacques Hol*land*er, Mr.

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Limekiller."

Mr. Limekiller stared. Something seemed to hit him, hard, on the inside of his head Jack O'Lantern. Jacques Hol*land*er. Jack *Hol*lander. "Oh my God!" he said. "So that's it. *The Flying Dutchman. . . .!*"

BUT, after all, that was *not* it.

Not by any means.

EMERGING FROM Government Buildings, Limekiller told the men outside—truthfully—that the Governor had cabled London about the matter. They were not naive enough to believe that this would mean an immediate end to their immediate problem. But. . . . still . . . the fact that London had been cabled. . . . *Lon-don* . . . that showed that at any rate the matter was being regarded as important. "Something must be done," an ex-King had once said. Well. . . . something had been done. Not very much, maybe. But something.

Not enough, however, to make anyone any the more willing to consider shipping south with Jack Limekiller.

Still, when he got back to pier and boat, he found that the entire cargo had been laden aboard.

He had not expected that, and, on reflection, he considered that it was maybe more than he had any right to expect, at that.

Limekiller was certainly not afraid of any Flying Dutchman or Jack O'Lantern, no. But he had his own fears. He did not advertise them, but he knew what he had. Limekiller was an acrophobe. He was, in common speech, afraid of heights. He would not, he could not, have climbed to the top of his own mast to save himself from being hanged from it. So he could, now, well understand how men who were afraid of neither gunfire nor hurricane could all but (in old John Aubrey's blunt phrase) beshit their breeches at the thought of facing this spectre of the sea.

"Me go near *he*?" the last one asked had said. —And no need, anymore, to say who *'he'* was. *"Whattt*? ME go near HE? No, mon, no. No bloody fear me go near he. What me fear, mon, me bloody fear he go near *me*!"

Limekiller understood.

And, also, he understood that, somehow, somehow, he was going to have to undertake the task of bringing his cargo down and, somehow, getting it ashore, all by his lone.

ALL THAT HE KNEW about Curasow Cove, really, was that the curasow was a large bird which roosted in trees and was regarded as good hunting. The shore showed on the map as dry, and not "drowned," land; and the water was free from coral-heads. The map did not show how deep the Cove was; of course, the deeper it was near shore, the easier his task would be. The map was fairly new, it was far from perfect, but it was the only completely new map of the colony and its waters that there was. Witness that it was new: no seemingly solid mass was shown off the northeast shore and labelled *Anne of Denmark Island.* What showed there instead was the mass of shoals and shallows and mangrove "bluffs" (i.e. bogs) and here and there an islet: which was what really *was* there: as Limekiller well knew, having been there himself. But every other map, without one single exception which he knew of, showed the same fictitious

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and seemingly-solid *Anne of Denmark Island*. Perhaps there had really at one time been such an island of that size and shape, it might have been broken up. . . . half-drowned . . . eaten away. . . . by hurricanes. This had happened to more than one cave.

As to when the original map, or chart, from which all the others (except this newest one) had copied . . . or been copied from copies of copies . . . as to when *that* one had been made, or made by whom: Limekiller had no idea. Captain Cook, maybe.

He had a good enough wind to take him out. Port Caroline was soon enough merely a white blur with red spots marking its roofs. He passed Bamboo Creek and The Nose and Warree Bight; past Warree Bight he had to put in closer to shore to avoid coral-heads. The beach was the highway down around here, with paths—not visible from his distance—leading back to the numerous "plantations" in the bush. Anyone expecting anything resembling anything from *Gone With The Wind*—white columns and all that—in the way of a plantation, well. . . . Hereabouts the word retained its simple and original meaning: it was a place where things were planted.

In other words, a farm.

Almost without exception the farms were small, from an acre to three. None of them would have ever been plowed. It was the hut and hoe culture, as it had obtained among the American Indians, as it had obtained among the West Africans. Moving down the coast by wind and current, Limekiller could see the ever-present procession along the beach: mostly women in bright dresses, walking stately and proud: a stance which may have had something to do with social personality, but which certainly had much do with their carrying almost everything balanced upon their heads. Babies, no; babies were carried on the hip. Everything else went by head: bundles of yams, sticks of firewood, a basket of fruit—even an axe.

All this was as expected, what was not as expected was the incoming mist. Mists were not unknown but mists were not common. The last one Jack had seen had been, exactly, on the Night before Christmas. It was not night now and it was nowhere near Christmas. Be all of which as it may, love laughs at locksmiths and the weather often laughs at the weatherman, and there was a mist on the waters and coming towards him from the south; that is, just then, against both the wind and the current—of course, there could be a different wind and current down there . . . however far away "down there" was . . . in which case he wanted to know about it. Being a one-man crew, he had no log to toss astern for reckoning his speed, he did that by guess and by God.

So, now, he turned his face shorewards to get a better guess as to how fast he might be going: the shore was bare of a single human figure. Where, a moment ago—surely, only a moment ago?—there had been twenty to forty figures strolling on the strand, now his eyes saw not a single one. Not one, not even one. It was as though they had been been swallowed up by the sand. Which was of course impossible. It was of course possible that they had all been bound for one destination, some local equivalent, perhaps, of a barn-raising or a

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husking-bee. . . . maybe one of the jollifications locally called "funs" . . . and had all turned up one and the same path. Possible.

If so, however, he had been daydreaming and had lost track of time. He returned his attentions to the mist.

And the mists parted, in part, and he saw the man in the long-boat.

The man in the longboat was bent over, Limekiller could not see his face, only the arch of his back under his white shirt. He might have been searching for something at the bottom, or doing something else—somehow, his position suggested strain—could the man be sick? According to ancient and local maritime custom, Limekiller ought to have had a conch-shell next to his free hand, ought, also, to have had a distinctive conch-call all his own. . . . ought to have known what call to sound upon this oldest of sea-horns to signify, Are you in trouble?—or, simply, Get the Hell out of my way! As, however, he had no conch and the whole custom was almost in complete abeyance, he merely shouted, *"Longboat ahoy!"*

It worked. The man looked up. The two vessels were getting closer now. He could see now that the man was not wearing a white shirt. The man was not wearing any shirt at all, the man's face and throat were reddened, tanned, by sun and wind, but his body was the white of a White man who does not usually go shirtless. The man in the longboat started to raise one hand—the other seemed, although Limekiller could not be sure, seemed to be pressed to his side—they were not close enough for Jack to be sure of that, or sure of another notion he had, that the man had no clothes on at all—Hell, *yes!*—the fellow *was* sick! —Sick or injured . . . *what* a look of pain and agony upon that face!

"Hold on, hold on! I'll throw you a line! I'll—"

He was not sure what else he was about to offer. He saw the man raise his other hand, streaming with blood— The mists closed in as though a curtain had been pulled across. Jack swung the tiller sharply. Surely to God he would not want to run down a boat with a wounded man in her! The man might not be able to swim, and even though one was always being assured that sharks were seldom to be seen in close to shore around here, still . . . He did not run the boat down. He did not see anything of it. He called into the mist for the fellow to give him a hail so he could put about for him—There was no answer. The mists showed nothing, then the mist was all around him, and, oh, God! What piercing cold!

It could only have been a matter of seconds. He had sailed through the mists. He was shivering, shivering, trembling, under the hot sun. Never mind any of that, had to find that fellow, find his boat. He put his helm around. . . .

There was no mist.

There was no boat.

Curasow Cove *was* deep. It was not the Mindanao Deep, to be sure. It was deep enough for the *Sacarissa* to come right up to shore. In fact, Limekiller was able to moor her to a palm tree. He was in several ways grateful for this; for one thing, he had not really relished the notion that he might have to do Robinson Crusoe stunts and float elements of the cargo ashore. The timber, for example. To say nothing of many, many trips of

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the skiff for to fetch the non-floatable items: nails, paint, corrugated iron, and such. Fortunately, Curasow Cove was deep enough so that he didn't even get his feet wet, unloading. It was so deep, Limekiller mused, bethinking himself not to trip with the anchor-chain round either ankle, it was deep enough for Full Fathom Five's father to be lying there, now, his bones turned to coral and his eyes to pearls.

The curve made in the shore by the water was paralleled, a bit back, by another curve made in the bush by absence of bush. Either a difference in the soil, or some recent "cleaning" of the land, or what. . . . like the tonsure of a Celtic monk, the ground curved gently back against the trees . . . . not far away. . . . never far away, trees, in those latitudes . . . a sort of lawn, covered with heart-shaped green leaves containing, measure for measure inside, a red-heart-shaped design. These were locally called Bleeding Heart, and they looked mighty dignified and worthy of a bishop to wait him with.

There was deep water, so. A bit back in the bush was a stream, so: it trickled into the Bay—not much of a stream, but betokening a spring. The King Town Municipal Water Service did not after all extend its pipelines down this far; neither did the distilled-water man and his *garrafones* interest the Nationals. So the bishop was in luck in a few several ways. Limekiller got his back into his work and imagined the place as it would look, with standard coconut palms along the shore, just for fancy (as well as for nuts). . . . a bit back, perhaps behind the bungalow, would be dwarf cocounts: more convenient for a man of retired years, who could scarcely be expected to shinny up a tree whenever he wanted some fruit.

Jack had piled quite a bit of cargo well above high water-mark, and was sweating heartily. He thought of how nicely a cold beer would go down about now, and happily it was that he remembered having let one down upon a string into the deep, deep waters of the Cove: the surface was warmed by the sun, but the depths . . .

He took hold of the string and, suddenly, he was on his knees, in a shaking spasm of chill which racked his whole body.

"Why, Mr. Limekiller," the medical officer had said, some while back, when he was asked, "yes, I can prescribe you an anti-malarial drug, but I advise against it. You see, malaria has been almost stamped out here, and, even if you should get it, we can fix you up in a few days—whereas, should you get bad reactions or side-effects from the medicine itself, it might take *months*. . . ."

So here he was, miles and miles from any human being, and it had to be here and now that he suddenly came down with it.

He was on his knees, head bent, and he was looking down into the greeny depths of the cove, a few feet away. Something was down there, something manlike and white. Something which slow, now, began to rise towards the surface, slowly turning as it did so. It was the body of the man in the mist, the man in the longboat: he *had* fallen overboard, he *had* drowned, and his body had drifted ashore. . . . here . . .

The drowned face turned his way and looked at him—or appeared to—and the drowned face. . . . But wait, but wait! Do the faces of men

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who have drowned change expression before one's very eyes? Do drowned bodies clutch one side with one hand? Do the faces of drowned men suddenly change as though their mouths were open and screaming, down way below the water? And, most horrid of all: do drowned men bleed. . . . ?

BY AND BY somebody hailed him. He had been half-sitting, half-lying, against the pile of planks. "Mr. Limekiller! I di recognize you boat, sah. Teenk me come ashore, ahsk hoew de day—Eh, Mr. Jock. . . . You sick, mon? Sick?"

"Think I just had an attack of malaria," Jack mumbled. The chill was gone, the fever hadn't come. He just felt very, very bad. Who was this, now, with the familiar voice. He peered out of his half-closed eyes.

"Eh, Jock, me gweyn fetch you some-teeng *good*! Bide a bit!" As though there were anywhere for Limekiller to stray off to! In a minute the man was back. Harlow the Hunter, that was who he was. In his hand he had a bottle with a bunch of. . . . "Ahl right, noew, Jock, dis naught but *rum* with country yerba steep een eet. Suppose you tehk some. Ah lee' swallow. Eh?"

Whatever kind of country herb the twigs were, they had given a bitter taste to the rum: but that was okay. Anything was okay. He wasn't alone now. He took a sip. He took another sip. He put the bottle down, and thanked the man for it.

Harlow looked in his eyes. "Very odd, Jock. You wyes not yellow ah-*tahl*! Cahn't be malaria. No sah. Muss be some-teeng else."

Limekiller felt he could let the diagnosis wait. "What are you doing down around here, Harlow? I thought all the Baymen south of King Town were ferrying stuff to Pine Tree Creek. . . . or else holed up in Port Caroline."

Horlow looked puzzled. "Mon, I no care for keep no ferry schedule. Hahv wahn lee' caye oet in de Welshmahn C'yes, I juss be oet dere husking coconut, mehbe wahn week, mon. Ahnd what you mean, 'hole up in Port Caroline'? What you mean, mon?"

Jack took another dram of the infusion. "I mean, oh, *you* know. God. The Jack O'Lantern. The, the Flying Dutchman—" But Harlow at once shook his head, vigorously. Negatively. The Colony of British Hidalgo was small. And its population was small. It was, nevertheless, a place with diversity: the little room of infinite riches, in a way. Even its folklore was not of one piece of fabric.

"What you mean, Flying Dutchmon, mon? What you mean, Jock, Flying *Dutch*-mon? Ees no such teeng, Jock. No, mon, e's no such teeng. Eet ees ah *Eng*-leesh-mon! Eet ees Coptain *Blood*, mon! Ahn he ahl-ways hahv een he's hahnd ah mahp, mon. Ah chart, mon. Becahs he seeking someteeng, mon, Jock. But what he seek, mon, he cahn *nev*-ah fine! He seeking sol*va*tion, mon. He glahry in hees chart, mon. But what say de Laard? De Laard say, 'Lef heem who weel glahry, lef heem glahry een dees: Dot I am de Laard who mehk Heaven ahn Ort, mon.' "

THERE WAS, of course, no drowned body in the Cove.

Nor anywhere else to be seen.

AS LONG AS Harlow had no idea of Jack's particular reason for talking about it, he talked about it a lot, all

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the while insisting that Limekiller sit still while he himself stacked and stashed. "Ah, Jock, me nevah hear of no Coptain Blood who steal de King jewels frahm London Tow-ah, like you say. Ahn ahs fah de cinema, mon, dot feelm, weet Errol *Fleen*! Why, dey hahv de fox ahl *rahng*, mon. Ahl *rahng*! Why, me di lahf aht de feelm!"

A faint scent of something sweet came on the breeze. Spice-seed, perhaps. Limekiller felt a good deal better already. "What were the facts, then, Harlow?"

"Why, de fox, Jock: Foct *ees*, de bloody cop-tain he di sail under a corse, true, fah true. He corse, ahl right. You know dot? Ahl right. But you no di know *why* God corse heem, *why* de Laard God fi corse heem. Fi why? Becahs, mon, he lef dem heeden teenk he *God*, mon. Dem heeden sovvage, dey di teenk *he* God, mon: ahn he *lef* dem teenk so. Dis wah de nature ahv hees seen, mon. De Laard say—nah true, Jock? Nah true?—'Dow sholt hahv no oddah God befah ME,' mon. So he DOM, mon. De Cop-tain Blood, de Bloody Mon, he DOM, mahn, teel ahl etornity. Een de lahs day, he weel fine forgeevness. He *weel* fine morcy. . . . not teel den. Not teel den. Teel den, Jock, he *muss* sail de Seven Sea, mon, wid he side ahl tarn w'open, wid he side ahl bleed-*deeng*, Becahs he deny hees Laard, mon, ond so he muss bare de same *wound*, mon, becahs—"

Limekiller said, remembering, "But the Captain's wound was a larger one than that. It's larger than the wound of a spear-thrust."

Harlow had two planks on his shoulders. He stood absolutely still for a moent. Then he said, "Hoew you know dees, Jock, mon?"

Jack said, "Because I've seen him. Once, yesterday, at sea. And once, today . . . Right here. I mean. . . ." He pointed towards the shore, "right there. . . ."

Harlow set down his planks. Slowly. Slowly. By accident or by design, the shadows took the form of a cross. And then he did something which seemed to Limekiller, then and thenafter, to be—considering—a very brave thing.

He sat down next to Limekiller, and he put his arm around him.

VERY WELL. They had been mistaken, up there at Port Caroline. It was not the Jack O'Lantern, who sailed at night. It was instead Bloody Man, Captain Blood, who sailed by day. Who sailed by day, appearing from time to time, often in his longboat, sometimes walking the sand, sometimes merely standing at the water's edge: but always, always, with his hand pressed to his side and his face a face of pain and agony. Always, that is, except when he took his hand away. And showed his bloody, gaping wound.

If these visitations, these apparitions, followed anything resembling a regular schedule, then Harlow the Hunter did not know of it. He did know, however . . . or, anyway, he had anyway heard it said, that at any given season of his re-appearance, he showed up, first, in the south . . . and then, slowly headed north . . .

First, in the south. This would explain both why the Black Arawak had so suddenly, and so unlike them, abandoned their traditional fishing-grounds in the south: and headed north. And why the Baymen would not, why they really, *really*, would

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not, consider shifting themselves to the southern fishery. "Slowly heading north. . . ." Well, one such show, and the north-central fishing-grounds were going to be emptied, too. For sure.

How long had this all been going on? Harlow had no dates, as such. But he had at least something like a date. The Bloody Captain, Bloody Man, Captain Blood, had been appearing since about the time, he said, "When we di fight de 'Paniard oet by St. Saviour C'ye."

For hundreds of years the Great Barrier Reef had served to protect this obscure corner of Central America from the otherwise all-conquering Spaniards. In theory, at least, by logic, certainly, the Spaniards must have realized that something, Something must lie the other side of the great Reef. . . . something other than "Chaos and the void." But, with so much else to concern them, savage and perhaps not-so-savage empires teeming with gold, hills of almost solid silver, shires and shires of well-tended arable land: why should they have concerned themselves overmuch with the question of, Something lost beyond the reef. . . ?

Besides. The English knew the only channels *through* the reef.

And the Spaniards didn't.

But; of course, they had tried to find it.

They got as far as St. Saviour's Caye, once. In those days, St. Saviour's Caye was co-capital with King Town. There had been a battle there. Or, there had not. National historians were divided on the point. Legend, however, legend said that there had been a battle there. And the date assigned to this battle, legendary or otherwise, was sometime in the 1790s.

There was nothing, or almost nothing, nowadays, on St. Saviour's Caye. Time and the sea and the savage winds had torn at it. It had once been a green and lovely isle, with stately houses, with taverns, a church, a graveyard. . . . Now it was perhaps a third of its former size. Sand dunes covered it. Heaps of ruined coral lay decomposing, stinking. Here and there a piece of a long-dead tree lay, roots up. Sometimes the rare antiquarian might discover a slab of marble, carven long ago in London, with a funery inscription on it. And that was it. That was all. That was St. Saviour's Caye.

If, however, Bloody Man had headed there before. . . . .

"Well," Limekiller said. "It is the Church which sent me here—"

"Yes, mon. Yes, Jock."

"And so I am going to lay the whole matter right in the arms, or the lap, maybe, of the Church. Right, Harlow?"

"Well, sah. . . ."

"What do you think?"

Harlow was small and Black and thin and strong as wire-rope. He nodded his head, slowly, slowly. "No bet-tah place, me teenk, b'y. Een fock, me b'y: No oddah place. . . ."

THE ARCHBISHOP SAID: "It has been one of my sorrows that I've not found the way of being of more service to the Arawak people, Mr. Limekiller. To be sure, they are not quick to give their confidence, as a rule, to outsiders. Perhaps one shouldn't wonder, considering their history. Still . . . Still . . . Perhaps it is because I am not White enough. Or, again, perhaps it is because I am not Black enough. It is the pity of history

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that such things should matter."

Archbishop Le Beau was, in fact, what the Bayfolk called "clear," meaning in terms already beginning to sound archaic in North America, a light Coloured person. He was, in fact, almost exactly the color of an old papyrus.

And he said: "Well, Mr. Limekiller, you are not the first to tell me this story. But you are the first to tell it me in the present tense and in regard to so near a point in time and space. We do have a duty. In regard, of course, to the people of this coast who are so stricken with fear. . . . And also. . . . . and not; I believe, not less, to this poor, wretched wanderer. I must go out there. Even a few years ago, even five years ago, I should have gone out alone. I cannot do so now, I must have help. Would you be afraid to go with me? To help this wraith, and to give him the rest which he has been so long seeking? I am not. But then, of course, sir, I am old. I am very, very old. . . ."

For a moment, during which no one else said one word, the aged priest seemed deep in meditation. Then he said, "There have always been those who clearly believed that any souls which have fallen from Grace—as this one's clearly has—are irremediably damned, and that 'their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. . . .' But I am not one of those. Others say, that such a soul is, becomes, more or less automatically the captive of the Fallen Ones, about whom perhaps the least said, the better; for they are not likely to submit to having Grace restored to him. They may fight, you know, my sons. They might fight back, for they have had him in bondage a long, long time: they might fight back. And as to what weapons they may use. . . . who dares consider?"

He made a gesture. Somewhat, he straightened his age-bent body. Then he looked up and around.

JACK WAS NOT happy at the notion. Not at all, not at all. And neither was Father Nollekens, whom they had found at Point Pleasaunce when they arrived. Least of all was Harlow happy. But it was Harlow who spoke first.

"May-be, Your Grace, we tehk alaang wan rifle?"

" 'Not by might and not by valor, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts.' Besides, of what use? You would surely not suggest anything like a silver bullet? This is not an enemy, this is a soul in torment." Harlow said no more.

The archbishop continued. "I am a Christian man, and so I do gird myself in the armor of Christ." He held out his hand to a small, black case. "There are the sacraments. I never go very far without them. It is my viaticum, my victuals for the journey. One never can know when, or even how, it may be needed."

Limekiller said, suddenly, "You think it will protect you—us! Maybe it will—"

The old man looked at him with something which was not entirely approval and which was certainly less than reproach. "Another citation from Scripture, sir. 'Let not him who putteth on his armor boast as him who taketh of it off.' "

There was in all this a certain Something which Limekiller did not understand. But Father Nollekens did, or thought he did.

"But sir," he said, leaning forward,

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"But Your Grace, there is no provision for this!"

"Well, then the Lord will provide."

"But, yes, but Your Grace: it has no precedent."

"Neither had the Resurection."

The small Black priest clearly felt he was not winning, but he tried once more. "Ah, but Your Grace— Have you no fear of the discipline of the Church?"

The archbishop looked at him, and stroked his white, white beard. "My dear boy— Forgive me. My dear Father. . . ., When one is eighty years old and a retired archbishop in a Church which never had an Inquisition and which has no pope, one may answer your question very easily: No."

He gave the same answer to the next question, which was Jack Limekiller's. "Do you think, Archbishop, that he . . . that it . . that the person we're talking about . . . may be heading for St. Saviour's Caye?"

"Certainly his destination of desire is the Holy Saviour, but not, I think, that Caye. No."

The night breeze blew through the windows of the small house, which, blessedly, were screened. The Bayfolk commonly had the habit of turning up their gasoline lamps to full power, thus producing a great amount of both light and heat, and then closing the solid wooden shutters of their unscreened windows in order to keep out the "flies" which the light attracted; as for the heat of the lamps, well, that made the nights no hotter than the days. Screens cost money, true: and when they had the money to buy the screens, they didn't. They had other things on their priority lists. The room was simply furnished, and, which pleased Jack also, nothing in it was made of plastic.

"Where, then, do you think he's bound for?"

The saintly old man said, softly. "Where would a dead man be bound for, in these waters? Why, sir, for Dead Man's Caye."

Jack broke the silence, and it seemed his own silence, it seemed the others were satisfied enough by that answer. "But . . . Archbishop. . . . isn't Dead Man's Caye a myth?" They shook their heads at this, all three. "It's *not*? I always thought. . . ." To be sure, he had given no systematic thought at all for it. He had heard the words, had thought them figurative. Did a drunken fisherman insist on setting off in a state of drunkenness, be sure someone would say, perhaps with a sigh, perhaps with a scorn, "Mon, he gweyn no-*place* but Dead Mon *C'ye*!"

And, although he was aware enough that he had slipped out of the allegedly logical time-stream of the post-mid-20th century and into some odd and un-timebound area where other laws, at least, obtained, still . . . he clutched for some semblance of familiar things. He said, almost like a child who says, But you *prom*ised—He said: "But it's not on the *chart!*" And he spread his hand over the map as it lay spread out on the table.

The old archbishop nodded, faintly sighed. "No. You are correct. It is not on that chart. Not on that new chart. On old ones, yes. Dead Man's Caye doesn't break the surface any longer, even. It was smashed by the Great Storm—the hurricane, we would call it—of 1910. I well remember—but that is neither here nor there. No. The new chart, no. The *old* charts,

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now. . . ." He reached his parchmenty hand to the rack of scrolls, more and more reproducing the note of a time and place even more antique than the Caribbean. He might have been the last Librarian at Alexandria, taking up a map made by the hand of Claudius Ptolaemeius himself. Archbishop Le Beau spread it out so that it was roughly approximate to the new one. "Look here," he said, pointing.

And yet his "here" was not where Limekiller's eyes at once settled. Without willing it or even witting it, his eyes at once went to the largest off-shore piece of land on the old map (and it was *old*): Sure enough. *Anne of Denmark Island*. This, then, may well have been *the* map, the original map, the master printed map, that is, from which all other maps down to this most recent-printed one, had copied. And his eyes flitted from the outlines, familiar enough to him, of the once-solid island named for the once-solid queen of James I . . . flitted to the corners of the margins of the chart. He knew that he ought to be looking where the archbishop was pointing, and so he did look there—but not before he had looked elsewhere: several fingers of the old man's other hand, holding the chart down to keep it from rolling back up, obscured some of the words Limekiller was looking for. But not all of them. Uncovered were the letters spelling, *k, Lt., R.N.* Very well, enough for now, some Lt. Black, or whatever, had made the old map, and had made it for the Royal Navy. *Now*—

Sure enough. A mere speckle of land. But it had its name. And its name was *Dead Man's Caye*.

"It is there we shall be going, in the morning, my sons."

Limekiller felt, anyway, some feeling of relief. "Might as well wait for daylight, I suppose," he said.

The old man's sunken eyes opened wider, looked at him. "It is not daylight that we are waiting for," he said, "Night or day, it is all the same. We are waiting for His Excellency. For the Governor."

NOT LESS than three times did waterspouts, those smaller cyclones of the sea, appear: and the third time there were three of them, evidently on a convergence course which would inevitably reach the vessel with a violence it could not hope to survive. "Steady at the helm," the archbishop said. "If we flee, they will pursue." The helm stayed more or less steady. Nearer and nearer came the waterspouts, like great gray-green twisting sea-serpents dancing on the surface of the sea.

"Elements of God, be not elementals of unrighteousness," the old voice said, (voice so feeble, and yet so strong); "unholy trinity deceived by Satan, I bid you three times in the Name of the God Who is One: Begone! Begone! Begone!" There was a sound like the simultaneous crashing of a thousand great waves. The sea heaved and swelled, the boat was drenched, the boat veered, shivered, tilted.

The boat righted itself. When Limekiller had wiped his eyes almost dry, dry enough to look around, the waterspouts were gone. But a small stand of tall mangrove trees, perhaps the only trees in all creation which can grow up out of the salt, salt sea—this stand of them was gone. Where it, they, had been, to starboard, the wrack and wreckage of them floated on the torpid waves.

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Something moved and muttered in the small hold. Something scrabbled, gobbled in a voice clotted by something thicker than phlegm. Perhaps, Limekiller thought, feeling his bowels both twist and—almost—loosen—it was not in the hold at all, but—

There was a coral shaol clearly visible, a few feet down, to port. "Port the helm!" a voice screamed, all but in his ear. He had never moved so swiftly in his life, he fell forward and down upon the wheel, the cutlas slashed the air where his head had been. The man screamed again and raised the cutlas again, the man was filthy, vile, face distorted with no normal rage, face framed in tangled beard, and, in the tangles, things that smoked— The man was gone. It was *not* "Bloody Man." The shoal slipped astern and behind.

"Teach," said Sir Joshua, in a voice fainter than Jack had ever heard his voice. "It *was* Teach. Goddamn him. . . . that is . . . ahh . . . Oh. Hm. Ah, well. . . ." His voice died away. The air stank of sulfur. And of worse.

But the clean breezes of the Bay soon swept all that away—a matter for which Limekiller was giving thanks—when he heard Harlow give a cry without words, saw his arm sweep outwards. Jack looked, saw an enormous shark, had not realized a shark could be so huge, had not believed such a shark would ever pass inside the reef: the shark was moving, and moving faster than he would have allowed for any shark to move: in a moment it would, must, surely strike them: and then—

"Ah, Satan, cease thy follies!" the archbishop said, almost impatiently . . "Canst *thou* hope to enthrall leviathan, and draw him on with a snare?"

Surely the shark swerved. Certainly the shark missed them. A moment or so later, looking back, Limekiller though he saw a fin break the surface, heading out to sea again. But perhaps it was only a porpoise. Or a piece of flotsam.

Or nothing at all.

"IT'S A GOOD THING the Colony is already autonomous," Sir Joshua said, wiping his red face with a red bandana—*not* part of his official accoutrements. "They don't really need me very much at all. Not, mind you," he added, stuffing the kerchief away and at once wiping his face on his forearm; "not, mind you, that I particularly want them to realize it in any particular hurry. . . . ah, well."

Dead Man's Caye lay dead beneath them. The water was clear, the mass of sand and coral could be clearly seen. If Limekiller had stepped over the side and stood with both feet upon the surface of the sunken caye, his head would still be above the water.

They had been there quite some time. They had encountered nothing untoward since arriving—in fact, they had encountered nothing there at all, except a huge manta, locally called "sting-ray," which, following the sun and avoiding the shadows of the clouds, flapped lazily away from them—

And it was hot.

And there was no cold beer along, this time, either.

In part to make conversation, in part only thinking aloud, Limekiller said, "I was looking at His Grace's old chart last night, and—"

Sir Joshua at once fell in with the subject. "Yes, indeed: Man was a na-

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tural mapmaker. Man was a natural explorer, too. Some say, you know, that he was naturally proud, that is, over-proud. I suppose one would call it *hubris*. Oh, I don't mean that he was a bloody Captain *Bligh*, though, mind you, Bligh has had a bad press, you know, a damned bad press . . . However. . . . Beside the point. Yes. Polk's men adored him." Jack thought to himself, *'Polk,' hey. Not 'Black.'* As for the rest, Jack hadn't a thought at all. "But there was that one fatal incident. That one fatal show of weakness. *We* might not consider it such, but such it was. You recollect Kipling's story of the man who would be"

Sir Joshua's voice simply had ceased. There was no diminuendo. No one would have been still listening, anyway. No one would have been looking at him, either. Everyone had suddenly, in one and the same instant, become aware of two things. One was sudden mist and cold.

The other was the head of a man protruding from the water just abaft the stern. The man's body could be seen, wavering in the water, white and pliant. The man's face and throat were between sun-reddened and sun-tanned. Once again Limekiller felt that deadly chill, but this time he did not fall into trembling. He was able to look the man's face straight on. Chill though the air was to him, beads of sweat appeared on the face, and flowed downward, and fresh droplets took their place.

Sir Joshua's crimson countenance had gone a very faint pink.

And now the aged archbishop was there, and he had his vestments on, or, at any rate, he had some of them on. He knelt and spoke, as simply as though he were speaking to a familiar congregant in a familiar setting. He had, in fact, been speaking for a few seconds. ". . . if you have received Christian Baptism and if you desire to receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion according to the usage of the Church of England, indicate this desire by bowing your head."

The head bowed slowly down until the chin touched the water.

"Almighty, everlasting God," the archbishop went on, "Maker of mankind, who dost correct those whom Thou dost love, and chastise every one whom Thou dost receive; we beseech you to have mercy upon this Thy servant visited with Thine hand . . ."

Limekiller could no more have recollected every word or gesture than he could those in a dream. They went on. They went on.

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him. For whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. . . .

"Do you declare yourself to be truly repentent. . . ?"

Again, and again slowly, the head, face a mask of pain, of agony, the head bowed itself to the brim of the sea.

The archbishop began to recite the Lord's prayer, and, one by one, all those aboard joined their voices to his. Then they fell again silent, only the old man's voice continuing.

"While we have time, let us do good unto all men; and especially unto them that are of the household of faith . . ."

Not a breath disturbed the surface of the sea.

"Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins. . . .

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"Draw near with faith, and take this Holy Sacrament to your comfort. . . ."

". . . our manifold sins and wickedness, which we, from time to time, most grievously have committed, By thought, word, and deed, Against Thy Divine Majesty, provoking most justly Thy wrath and indignation . . . We do most earnestly repent, And are most heartily sorry for these our misdoings; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us; the burden of them is intolerable."

Limekiller could no longer look upon the face, and, indeed, it had seemed, before he looked away from it, that the face could no longer look at them: it had closed its eyes.

"Almighty God. . . . Have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your sins. . . ."

The old priest had opened his black bag some time before, had arrayed its contents upon a cloth upon a board. He needed hardly pause at this point. "Take and eat this in remembrance. . . . Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee . . . forgive us our trespasses . . . deliver us from evil. . . . grant that those things which we have faithfully asked according to Thy will may effectually be obtained, to the relief of our necessity, and to the setting forth of Thy glory; through Jesus Christ Our Lord.

"*Amen*. . . ."

WHEN Limekiller next looked, the water was empty. Almost a full fathom beneath the surface, the sandy bosom of Dead Man's Caye lay open to his gaze. He saw. . . . he thought that he saw. . . . the prints of human feet. Even as he gazed, the water slowly moved, sand slowly trickled along and down and into; in another moment, all was as before.

As long, long before.

FIRST, they went to tell the Arawak that they could leave the northern waters. Next they went to tell the Baymen that they could once again go south. And to both they told that Captain Blood, the Bloody Captain, Bloody Man, would never sail his longboat ever along these coasts and shores. Were they believed? They were believed. As Harlow the Hunter put it, " 'By de mouds of two weetnesses shahl ah teeng be estoblish.' " And such a two witnesses as an archbishop and a royal governor are not to be held lightly in their testifying to such a matter as that one.

The old high priest remained in the stern all the voyage back, praying, presumably, or meditating. Sir Joshua was at the helm, and Jack Limekiller was next to him. "What are you going to tell them in King Town?" he asked. "What report will you make to London?"

"Presumptuous boy," Sir Joshua said, without malice. "Why—I shan't tell them a *thing*, in King Town. They won't even ask. In fact, they are no doubt simply delighted to have had me available in this crisis. Whom would they have sent, instead? The Minister for Social Development? The Under-secretary for Public Health? —As for London, I can't tell *you* a thing, my boy, 'twouldn't be constitutional, you know. Suffice it to say: No trouble from London. In fact, no trouble *in* London. What would you think? A question asked in the House of Commons? Tchah. Put it out of your mind."

Far, far ahead, the Mountains of the Morning lifted their hazy peaks

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against the early evening sky. Faint, faint, yet much, much nearer, the low-lying coast began to come into focus. "Gladly," Jack said. "So . . . well. . . . Oh, yes. I want to ask you. What *about* Kipling's story, *The Man Who Would Be King*. . . ?"

"Ah, yes. Well. Well, I didn't mean that our poor man would have been king. I mean that Daniel whatever his name was, Daniel Dravit, was it? Kipling's character. Where was I. Mmm. Yes. Back there in Kaffiristan. White Kaffirs of the Hindu Kush. Fact, you know, not fiction. Well, the story was fiction itself. What I mean is: fellow in the story, Daniel, allowed the heathen, the kaffirs, to think he was a god, you know. Didn't in so many words say so. Let them think so. And when the wench bit him and drew his blood, why that was bloody well *that*. Well, similar thing with poor Cook. The Hawaiians thought that *he* was a god, one of their native gods. Name of Lono. Symbol of Lono was white cloth on a pole. They had no sails, you know, Hawaiian chaps, I mean. When they saw Cook's ships coming in, poles crowded with white cloth sails, why—obvious conclusion—Lono. And Cook let them think so. He went along with it. Let himself be worshipped, accepted offerings, the whole thing—Then there was all that trouble at the shore, forget just why, and some native chap hit him with a spear, twasn't a fatal thrust, no. The blow itself wasn't fatal. But he groaned. *Cook groaned!*"

Sir Joshua took a hand from the wheel, put it to his side, made realistic noises. "—What? A god groan? A god feel *pain*? Native fellows were *furious*! They'd been *done*, you see, and suddenly they knew it. Pranged the poor fellow, cut him down, and—"

Limekiller had been listening with a mixture of fascination and confusion. Now he had to stop the narrative and get a firmer grip and grasp on it. "Excuse me, Sir Joshua—"

"—ah—Mmm—Yes, my boy. What?"

"What is the connection?"

Sir Joshua considered this. Evidently it confused *him*. "Connection with *what*, Jack?"

"I mean . . .what is the connection between Captain Cook and . . . well, with *any*thing? Anything at all? That was in Hawaii. And we—"

At a sudden hail from Sir Joshua, Harlow came and took the helm. Sir Joshua, taking Limekiller by the arm, led him back and sat him down. "Now, my boy," he began. He seemed to be struggling with a slight show of temper. Then control won. "Now, my boy, it is exactly Captain Cook who . . . well, con*found* it, boy!" Control lost. "Who in blazes do you think this so-called Bloody Man, this alleged Captain Blood *is*?" In a lower voice, he said, "Was. . . ."

There was a rather long silence. Then Limekiller said, "Do you mean it is supposed to have been Captain Cook? *The* Captain—"

Sir Joshua shook his head, sadly. Then he asked Limekiller what he meant by "supposed to have been"? Had not Limekiller *seen* the whole thing? Hadn't Limekiller described the gaping wound in the man's side? Had he or had he not?

"Yes, yes! But . . . as I told Harlow, when he—well, in another connection: the wound which I saw was far too large for a spear-thrust. You yourself just said the spear-thrust wasn't fatal. He was killed, Cook, you said, he was killed when they cut him

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down."

"Ah, yes," Sir Joshua said, somberly. "They cut him down all right. *And then they cut him up!*"

And then it all came back to Limekiller. "Polk," there was no "Polk," that was only his ear, catching at a name he was not expecting to hear, and catching instead a name which hadn't even been uttered. Captain Cook. Oh yes. Of course. Yes, they *had* cut him up. They had cut him all the way up. They had cut him into pieces. And they had sent each piece to one of the district chiefs. Of course, they had brought them back, by and by. Very soon, in fact. For one thing, there were, after all, the heavy guns of His Majesty's ships. And, for another— But the for another didn't matter. They had brought back the pieces of Captain Cook.

That is, they had brought back all but one of the pieces of the body of Capatin Cook.

The Hawaiians had been cannibal, then . . . at any rate, upon occasion.

"And that one piece?"

Sir Joshua sighed heavily. Again, he wiped his face. "It was a piece of his right side," he said.

THE OFFICES of National Archivist and National Librarian co-existed in the person of Mr. Frances Bustamente. "Here is the very book, Mr. Limekiller," he said. "And, as to the chart, I have sent down for it, it should be up here, presently. —Hm, well, that is very curous."

Limekiller had the heavy old book in his hand. He wanted to sit down at table and chair and look into it. But Mr. Bustamente's courtesy required an equal courtesy in return. "What is very curious, sir?"

"Well, evidently, going by the Acquisition Numbers, we must have acquired both chart and book at the same time. And they are both prefixed with AD, that means, Admiralty, you know. I am afraid that the Admiralty in London has never given us anything . . . anything that *I* know of . . . but it did sometimes happen that the commanding officers of different vessels of the Royal Navy would sometimes contribute things to the old Colonial Government. . . . in the old days . . . things they had perhaps no further use for. . . . And we always recorded this to the extent of putting AD for Admiralty before the Acquisition Numbers. —Well, I shall leave you to your book, now."

The book was no lightweight, and would have taken more time than Limekiller could spend in the cool and dim chamber to read; it did not circulate. *A History of the Hidalgo Plantation and Woodcutters' Settlements / In the Bay of Hidalgo / In Central America / From the Earliest Times / With Many Anecdotes and Illustrations [etc., etc.] by the Rt. Honorable Sir. L. Dawson Pritchard / Sometime Colonial Magistrate.* For a marvel, the book was indexed.

Yes, Cook had been here. Cook had not been here long, but— Evidently he had loved this hidden coast (as it then was). Had loved it so much that as he sailed away the last time in life he had been heard to say, "I'll be back. I'll be back. I shall be back. Living or dead, I shall be back. By God, I shall." And old Esquire Northrup, waiting to go ashore with the pilot, and who had dined so well at the farewell that he was probably half-seas over, said, "Well, Cook, and as I am one of His Majesty's Commissioners for Oaths, shall I record this

(cont. on page 71)

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Well, that trouble-maker—Ova Hamlet—is back again, just as forecast last issue. Richard Lupoff, who acts as our go-between with the redoubtable Hamlet, assures us that this story was written by "autocratic" writing, while Ova was in a trance. Passed-out drunk, more likely. In any case, the author of this story, whoever he or she may be, has told a tale fully as outrageous as any in Ova's ouevre. It is a curious story and it only begins with the theft of the—

GOD OF THE NAKED UNICORN

OVA HAMLET

Illustrated by Daniel J. Steffan

I.

It was a chilly winter's evening and the sound of jingling coach bells attached to the harness of carriage horses pentrated both the swirling yellow fog of Limehouse where the Thames swerves and eddies and dark Lascar shapes flit through shaded passages, and the ancient rippled glass of the windows of my humble flat to remind even a sad old man that there were yet revellers at large in the city anticipating the joyous holiday of Nativity.

My mind fled back to earlier, and jollier, holiday seasons, seasons spent in my youth amidst the savage tribesmen of barbaric Afghanistan before a jezail bullet cut short my career in Her Majesty's service, causing me to be seconded home and returned, ultimately, to civil existence. At home in London I had attempted to support my modest needs by setting up practice in Harley Street, but had been forced to accept accomodations with another person of my own class and station in order to make ends meet.

That had been the beginning of my long and happy association with the foremost consulting detective of our time—perhaps of any time. A confirmed bachelor, my associate had treated persons of the female persuasion with unstinting chivalry and kindness through all the time I had known him, yet on only one occasion had he permitted himself to entertain romantic notions concerning a member of the more gentle sex, and had, in all the years that followed the incident, refrained from ever speaking the name of the person involved.

On occasion of each of my own marriages he had congratulated myself and my bride effusively, assisted in supervising the packers and drayers in the removal of my personal belongings from our bachelor digs, and

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maintained a friendly if somewhat aloof interest in my wellbeing until such time as the exigencies of fate dictated the termination of my marital state and my return to our lodgings in Baker Street.

That was all ended now. The great detective had retired from practice and was devoting himself to the cultivation of bees on the Sussex Downs. My own latest assay upon the sea of matrimony having brought up upon the sharp rocks of disaster I had returned to 221B to find my old home occupied by a stranger. Upon application to the ever faithful Mrs. Hudson I had been told, amidst the most pitiable wringing of hands and shedding of tears, that my associate—I should say, my former associate—had vacated, lock, stock and persian slipper. Gone, the good woman told me tremblingly, were the famous dagger, the files of news-cuttings, the phonograph and bust, the gasogene and the ill-famed needle.

Even the patriotic initials V R marked in bullet holes knocked in Mrs. Hudson's treasured mahagony wainscotting had been patched and varnished over so that every trace of the former occupancy was excised, and only a false and sterile pseudo-hominess marked the chambers I had so long occupied.

So distraught was I upon learning of this turn of affairs that I was barely able to accept Mr. Hudson's offer of kippers and scones washed down with a tumbler of Chateau Frontenac '09 before stumbling back into the chill night.

I was disconsolate!

In a state of financial as well as emotional impoverishment, I wandered the streets of the greatest of cities, rebounding from the well-padded bodies of late shoppers and

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early revellers, making my way under the guidance of some ill-understood instinct through quarters imperceptibly but steadily more shabby, disreputable and dangerous. At last I found myself standing before the facade of the building which was shortly to become my abode.

A gas-lamp flickered fitfully behind me, casting weird and eerie shadows. The clop-clopping of horses' iron shoes upon cobblestones mingled with the creak of harness and the occasional distant scream which in Limehouse is best left uninvestigated, lest the self-designated Samaritan find himself sharing the misfortune of the one whom he had sought to assuage.

A yellowed pasteboard notice in a ground-floor window announced that a flat was available in the building—the condition of the pasteboard indicating that the flat had been unoccupied for some time—and by virtue of this ingenious deduction I was able shortly to bargain the ill-kempt and uncivil landlord to a price in keeping with my dangerously slim pocketbook.

Well had I learned the lessons of observation and deduction taught by my longtime associate—and now those lessons would pay me back for innumerable humiliations by the saving of considerable sterling to my endangered exchequer!

Hardly had I settled myself into my new domain when I heard the tread of a lightly-placed foot upon the landing outside my chambers, and then the knock of a small but determined hand upon the heavy and long-unattended door.

For an instant I permitted my fancy to imagine that the door would open to reveal a smartly-uniformed buttons—a street-arab of the sort sometimes employed by my associate—the homey, bustling form of Mrs. Hudson—perhaps even the tall, saturnine figure of my associate himself! But I had no more than begun to rise from the cushions of a shabby but comfortable armchair when reality smote down upon my consciousness and I realized that none of these knew the location of my new quarters. Far more likely would my caller prove to be some dark denizen of Limehouse here to test the mettle of a new tenant!

I pulled a small but powerful revolver from its place among my belongings and slipped it into the pocket of the dressing gown which I wore, then advanced cautiously toward the portal of the room and drew back the locking bar. Protesting loudly this imposition upon its seldom-exercised hinges, the door swung back and still farther back until there stood revealed in the opening to the landing the one person upon the face of the earth whom I would least have supposed to trace down my new whereabouts or to have reason of any nature ever to call upon me here.

Hardly could I so much as credit the evidence of my own eyes!

We must have stood for fully fifteen seconds in silent tableau—I with my eyes widened and my very jaw, I am certain, hanging open in astonishment. I was suddenly and uncomfortably aware of the reduced surroundings in which my caller had found me, and of the shabbiness which I fear I had permitted to come upon my personal demesne. My hair, once a rich brown in hue, had grown gray and unkempt with the passing years. My moustache was yellowed with nicotine and stained with wines and porters. My dressing gown was threadbare and marked with the souvenirs of many a solitary meal.

While my visitor was as breathtak-

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ing a figure as ever I had beheld: handsome rather than beautiful, she had borne the years since our last encounter with that grace and imperturbability which had marked her at one phase of her career as the most famous beauty of the dramatic stage, and at another as the woman for whom a throne had been risked—and saved!

"May I enter?" asked The Woman.

Coloring to the very roots of my hair I stepped back and indicated that she might not merely enter, but would be the most welcome and most honored of guests. "I must apologize," I said, "for my boorish performance. Can you fogive me, Miss—I should say Madame—Your Highness—" I halted, uncertain of how even to address my distinguished visitor.

Yet even as I stammered and reddened, I could not keep myself from observing the appearance of The Woman.

She was as tall as I remembered her to be, a hand more so than myself and nearly of a height with my longtime associate. Her hair, piled high upon her magnificent head in the European vogue of the period, was of a raven glossiness that seemed to throw back the light of my flickering kerosene lamp with every movement of the flame. Her facial features were perfect, as perfect as I had remembered them to be on the occasion of our first meeting many years earlier, and her figure, as revealed by the closely fitted fashions of the era, which she carried with the aplomb of one long accustomed to the attentions of the finest fitters and coutouriers of the continent, was as graceful and appealing as that of a school girl.

She had entered my humble chambers by now, and as I checked the landing behind her to ascertain that no footpad stood lurking in the musty darkness, The Woman ensconsed herself unassisted upon the plain-backed wooden chair which I was wont to utilize while wielding my pen in the pursuit of those modest exercises of literary embellishment about which my associate had so often chided me.

I turned and gazed down at my visitor, seating myself as near to her magnetic form as decorum might permit. At this closer range it was visible to me that her air of confident poise was not unstrained by some element of nervousness or even distress. I attempted to smile encouragingly at The Woman, and she responded as I hoped she would, her voice so cultured as largely to conceal the difficulty with which she maintained her equilibrium.

"May I come directly to the point, Doctor?" she inquired.

"Of course, of course, Miss—ah—"

"In private circumstances you may address me simply as Irene," she graciously responded.

I bowed my head in humble gratitude.

"You may feel some surprise at my tracking you down," The Woman said. "But I have come upon a matter of the greatest urgency. Once before I called upon you and your associate in an hour of grave crisis, and now that a problem of like proportion has arisen, I call upon you again."

"My associate is retired," I explained sadly. "If you wish, I will attempt to contact him by telegraph but he has indicated his complete dedication to apiarian enterprises and I hold grave doubts that he could be prevailed upon to leave Sussex."

"Then you must assist me. Please, Doctor, I would not have come here or disturbed your solitude in any way were it not for the extreme nature of the present situation."

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So saying she leaned forward and placed her cool and ungloved fingertips softly upon the back of my wrist. As if a galvanic current had passed from her organism to my own at the very touch of her fingers, I felt myself energized and inspired. The Woman was in trouble! And The Woman had come to me in her hour of need! I could never be so mean a bounder as to turn her away—surely not now when the very mantle of my mentor seemed about to fall upon my own uncertain shoulders.

"But of course, your high—Irene." I felt myself reddening to the very roots of my hair at the pronunciation of her given name. "If you will be so kind as to wait a moment while I fetch notepad and writing instrument so as to record the salient details of your narrative—"

I rose and fetched foolscap and nib, then quickly returned to my place opposite this charming visitor. For a moment I thought to offer her tea and biscuits with marmalade, but refrained at thought of the present condition of my larder and my pocketbook. "Pray proceed," I said.

"Thank you. I trust that I need not make mention of the location or manner of my current domicile, Doctor," The Woman began. Upon seeing my nodded response she said simply, "The God of the Naked Unicorn has been stolen."

"The God of the Naked Unicorn!" I exclaimed.

"The God of the Naked Unicorn!"

"No!" I blurted incredulously.

"Yes!" she replied coolly. "The God of the Naked Unicorn!"

"But—but how can that be? The greatest national art treasure of the nation of—"

"Shh!" She silenced me with a sound and a look and a renewed pressure of fingertips to wrist. "Please! Even in more familiar and secure quarters than these it would be unwise to mention the name of my adoptive motherland."

"Of course, of course," I murmured, recovering myself rapidly. "But I do not see how the God of the Naked Unicorn *could* be stolen! Is it not—but I have here a book of artistic reproductions, let us examine a print of the statue and see."

"It is burned into my memory, Doctor. I see it before my eyes day and night! For me, there is no need to examine an artist's poor rendering, but you may search your volume to find a representation of the great sculptor Mendez-Rubirosa's masterpiece!"

I crossed the room and returned with a heavy volume bound in olive linen-covered boards and opened it carefully, turning its cream-vellum leaves until I came to a steel engraving of the sculptor Mendez-Rubirosa's supreme achievement, the God of the Naked Unicorn. As I had recalled, the work had been cast in platinum and decorated with precious gems. The eyes of the god were rubies and those of the unicorns clustered worshipfully about, the deity's feet were of sapphires and emeralds. The horns of the unicorns were of finest ivory inlaid with filigreed gold. The very base of the sculpture was a solid block of polished onyx inlaid with Pekin jade.

"But the God of the Naked Unicorn is the national treasure of Boh—" I caught myself barely in time. "If its theft is made public the very crown itself would be once more endangered."

"Quite so," the woman known as The Woman agreed. "And a message has been received threatening that the sculpture will be placed on public

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display in St. Wrycyxlwv's Square if a ransom of eighty trillion grudniks is not paid for its return. And a deadline is given of forty-eight hours hence! You can see, Doctor, how desperate my husband and I are. That is why I came to you! You alone—if your colleage insists upon remaining with his apian charges—can help me!"

A million thoughts swirled through my poor brain at this juncture.

"St. Wrycyxlwv's Square!" I exclaimed.

"St. Wrycyxlwv's Square," she affirmed.

"But that is the national gathering place of your nation's fiercest and most implacable enemy!"

"Precisely, Doctor."

I stroked my chin thoughtfully, painfully aware of the unsightly stubble of unshaved whiskers that marred my appearance.

"And eighty trillion grudniks!" I repeated.

"Yes, eighty trillion grudniks," she said.

"That would be—roughly—forty crowns, nine quid and thruppence," I computed.

"That—or as close as to make no practical difference," my charming visitor agreed.

"Forty-eight hours," I said.

"Approximately two days," The Woman equated.

"I see," I temporized, stroking my chin once again. "And tell me, your high—I mean, Irene—have you and your husband made response to the demand?"

"My husband has instructed his chief minister to play for time while I travelled, in the utmost secrecy you understand of course, to seek your assistance. Yours and—" she paused briefly and cast her gaze through the mist-shrouded panes into the fog-swirled gaslight beyond "—but you say he is unavailable."

"And his distinguished brother—you of course recall his distinguished brother," I averred.

"Of course."

"Rusticated," I whispered.

"Rusticated?" she echoed, clearly aghast.

"Rusticated," I repeated.

The Woman reached into her lace-trimmed sleeve with the thin, aristocratic digits of one hand and pulled from it a tiny, dainty handkerchief. She dabbed briefly at her eyes. This was the moment, some inner demon prompted me to recall, at which an unscrupulous person of the male persuasion might initiate an advance in the guise of simple sympathy. But even as I sat berating my secret weakness The Woman regained control of herself. She replaced her handkerchief and regained her full composure.

"There is only one thing for it then, Doctor," she said firmly. "None other can help. You must come with me. You must give us your assistance!"

I rose and without a word slipped into mackintosh, mackinaw and cape, cap and galoshes, and extended my arm to the grateful and trembling Irene.

The game, I mumbled grimly to myself at a level of vocalization well below the audible, is afoot!

II.

LEAVING even my humble chambers I paused to set up the deadfall, intruder trap, burglar interdictory, automatic daguerrotype machine, and the bucket of water on top of the door. Then I drew in the latch-string and, turning to my charming companion, said "I am at your service, madame."

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We made our way down the stairs, checking at each landing for the presence of footpads or traitors, and emerged safely into the Limehouse night. A fine mist had begun to fall, wetting the soot-blackened remnants of a previous snowfall into a gray and slippery slush. My companion and I made our way through shadowy, echo-filled by-lanes until we emerged upon the West India Dock Road, site of so many infamous deeds and unexplained atrocities.

A shudder ran unrepressed through my form as we crossed a cobblestone-floored square. For a moment I imagined it St. Wrycyxlwv's Square, and before my mind's eye there arose the silvery-gray and jewel-sparked shape of the God of the Naked Unicorn—the national art treasure of The Woman's adoptive homeland and the potential cause of revolution and anarchy in that ancient landlocked principality!

Somewhere a scream rent the Limehouse night—whether that of a tramp beating her cautious way up the fog-shrouded Thames or of some poor unfortunate victim of the crime rampant in the streets of the ill-starred district, it was not for me to know.

A cab wheeled by, its curtains drawn, driver in muffled obscurity on the box, dark horses' accoutrements jingling and creaking with the movement of the steaming beasts.

My companion and I walked nervously through the impenetrable murk until, drawn by the lights of a lower-class establishment where the very scum of Limehouse roistered out their pitiful nights, we had the good fortune to see a cab roll up and discharge it passengers, a couple of debauched-looking mariners obviously somewhat the worse for wear and seeking a place in which to squander what poor remnants of their seamen's wage they retained after being gouged and cheated by parsimonious owners and dishonest pursers on their ship.

I was about to call the cabby when my companion stopped me with an urgent hiss and a pressure upon the arm.

A second cab pulled up before the tavern and as its load of unsavory occupants made their way from the conveyance we climbed into the cab and Irene delivered softly her instructions to the cabby who peered inquisitively through the trap into the passenger compartment.

The first cab had departed and my companion leaned toward me, saying "I should have thought by now, Doctor, that you would know better than to engage the first cab you encountered."

"But it had only just arrived," I protested. "There could have been no way for a malefactor to know we would be seeking transportation just at this place in time to send a cab for us."

At this point our conversation was interrupted by a flash of light and a loud report from a point directly ahead of our cab. The other vehicle had exploded in a gout of flame, and tongues of orange licked upward among clouds of black, oily smoke.

"Incredible!" I gasped in amazement. "How did you—?"

The Woman smiled inscrutably as our driver carefully picked his way around the first cab, now violently ablaze and all but blocking the intersection where the West India Dock Road was met by a winding thoroughfare that made its way upward from the Thames and into a safer and more reputable quarter than Limehouse.

We passed through numerous

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thoroughfares, some of them bustling and lighted as if it were noonday, others eerie and shrouded, until I felt that there was no way I could ever retrace our passage, nor less deduce the location of the moment, when at last the cab drew up at a kiosk whence individuals dressed in every manner and description entered and emerged into the street.

I chivalrously went halfies with Irene as to the cost of the cab, despite the embarrassing deficit of my financial situation, and we climbed from the cab onto the wet cobblestones of yet another London square surrounded by shops and restaurants all closed at this hour of the night. Without a word my companion led me carefully toward the kiosk, and drew me with her down a flight of darkened and ill-kept stair-steps until we reached a platform illuminated by a form of lighting totally unfamiliar to me. The flames seemed to be wholly enclosed in miniature glass globes, and to burn with a peculiar regularity and stability that permitted neither flickering nor movement. How they obtained the air to sustain combustion was a puzzle beyond my comprehension, but my companion refused to remain still long enough for me to make enquiry.

She led me past a large painted notice board marking the area of Ladbroke Grove, and depositing tickets in a turnstile device we made our way across the platform to wait for—I knew not what! There were railroad tracks before us, and my induction that this was a station of some sort was borne out in a few minutes when a train of a type and model unfamiliar to me approached. The train halted and we climbed aboard a coach, took seats, and rode in a strange and uncomfortable silence until my companion indicated that it was time for us to exit the odd train.

We made our way back to the surface of the earth and I discovered that we were standing on the edge of a broad, level area as large as a cricket field and then some, but whose surface, rather than being of grass, was composed of a hard, gritty stuff that exhibited none of the usual give and responsiveness of a natural substance.

My companion led me by the hand across the hardened surface until we stood beside the strangest contraption it has ever been to my wonderment to behold.

The thing was as long as a coach and rested on wheels, two rather largish ones at one end and a small one at the other. Its main substance seemed to be devoted to a ridged cylinder some rod or so in length and covered with a stressed fabric now glistening wetly in the night's drizzle.

Two open cockpits were located on the upperside of the thing, with curved shields of celluloid or isenglass before each and a set of bewildering dials and knobs in one of them. Stubby projections extended from the sides and rear of the machine, and a large wooden device not dissimilar to a marine screw was attached to one end, mounted to a black and powerful looking machine that I could only guess to be a self-contained engine of the sort sometimes used in small experimental marine craft.

Oddest of all, four free-swinging vanes projected from a pole mounted on the top of the machine, their ends drooping of their own unsupported weight and their entirety creaking and swaying slightly with each variation in the icy, drenching wind.

My companion reached into the closer cockpit and pulled from it a

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headgear for herself and one for me, demonstrating wordlessly the manner in which it was to be worn. It was made of soft leather and wholly enclosed the wearer's cranial projection. A strap caught beneath the wearer's chin thereby insuring a snug and secure fit of the headgear, and a pair of goggles fitted with transparent lenses could be slipped in place to protect the eyes from wind or moisture or raised onto the forehead to facilitate an unencumbered view in time of eased conditions.

My companion placed one shapely foot upon the stubby projection that stood away from the side of the machine and climbed gracefully into the cockpit. By means of silent gestures she communicated her desire that I emulate her actions, and not wishing to distress this brave and competent person I acceded, climbing upon the projection and thence into the second cockpit where I found myself seated upon a not uncomfortable leather cushion.

My companion turned in her place and indicated by gestures that I was to secure my seating by clamping a webbed belt across my lap. Again I acceded, watched over my companion's shoulder as she belted herself into position, and gasped in amazement to see a grease-covered and canvas-coveralled mechanician suddenly appear from a nearby outbuilding, race across the open area to our machine, grasp the wooden member which I could not help dubbing (in my mind) an aerial screw in his hands, and whirling it.

My companion, having acknowledged the arrival of the mechanician with a single-handed thumbs-up gesture, adjusted some of the controls before her and the self-contained engine at the front of the strange little craft coughed and sputtered its way into life! After warming the engine for some minutes my companion again gestured to the mechanician who pulled a set of inconspicuous chocks from before the wheels of the vehicle, and we rolled forward at an astonishing rate of speed, the wind whipping past us making me grateful for the helmet and goggles provided by my companion.

Before I had time even to wonder at the destination of this unusual mechanically-propelled journey I was distracted by the sound of a strange *whoop-whoop-whoop* coming from directly overhead and obviously keeping perfect pace with our own progress. I cast my gaze above in hopes of detecting the source of the strange sounds and discovered that they were coming from the four vanes mounted on the low tower above the cockpit where I sat.

The vanes were revolving so rapidly that I could barely follow them with my eye, and startlement was piled upon startlement when I felt the odd craft into which I was helplessly strapped actually *rise* from the field it had been crossing and move unsupported through the thin air!

I must have shouted my astonishment, for my companion turned her countenance toward me with a grin of such total confidence and surety of self that I laughed aloud at my momentary panic and vowed inwardly that I should permit nothing to interfere with my enjoyment of this unprecedented experience. The God of the Naked Unicorn might be missing, the great detective might be inseparably devoted to his bees on the Sussex Downs—at this very moment, if not abed, he might be engaged in the delicate and perilous activity of segregating the queen—but all was well

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with myself, and I would take the pleasure that was offered to me and worry later about my problems.

We flew—yes, I use the word advisedly and with full awareness of the gravity of its employment—in a great circle over the edges of London, watching the sun rise over the distant Channel to the east, passing perhaps over the very cottage where my former associate now made his home and tended his bees, and then swung in a northerly direction, passing over dark green woodlands and lighter meadows, leaving behind us England, Wales, Scotland, and the Orkney Islands.

No word was spoken—none could have been heard over the steady droning of the engine that turned the aerial screw that gave us our forward headway through the sky and that dragged the windmilling vanes of our overhead rotors through their vital revolutions—but I was amazed, from time to time, to see my companion half-climb from her cockpit and reach down upon the stubby projections from the sides of the craft and retrieve small teardrop shaped containers of fuel which she emptied into a nozzle mounted on the body of the craft in front of her own celluloid shield.

The sun had risen fully now, the sky was a sparkling northern blue with only spotty clouds of pure white dotting its cerrulean regularity, and neither land nor handiwork of man was visible on the sparkling aquatic surface beneath us. I know not how long we flew nor how far north we had proceeded, save to make note that the air around us was growing increasingly frigid and I increasingly grateful for the foresight that caused me to dress warmly before leaving my Limehouse chambers, when there appeared below us and in the far distance a glimmer of blinding white.

My companion reached for the last remaining fuel container mounted on the vehicle and emptied its contents into the nozzle she had used before her shield. Glancing over her shoulder toward me she pointed ahead of us and shouted a series of words which were lost to me in the drone of the engine and the rush of the air past my leather-covered ears.

But I soon came to understand the significance if not the actual content of her speech as, under her careful guidance, our little craft nosed downward and began a long, steady approach toward what I came now to recognize as nothing less than the great ice pack of the north polar regions of the planet! Lower and lower our little craft made its way, as the dark waters beneath our extended wheels gave way to jagged white icebergs, pack ice, and finally great glaciers.

The mountainous formation of the ice slipped beneath our droning craft as we sped through the lower reaches of the atmosphere, then gave way to a flat and level area of glistening white. We crossed this new expanse and at length my companion swung the craft into a pattern of tight circles, spiraling slowly downward before a formation I had initially taken to be an icy projection of unusual beauty and regularity, and only after many moments recognized for a building.

Here—in the northernmost wastes of the polar ice fields—was the handiwork of man! I nearly wept at the audacity and beauty of the construction, and was distracted from this train of thought only by the landing of the craft in which I rode. The vehicle rolled across the hard-packed snow and came to a halt near the entrance

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of the gorgeous building.

A gale sped across the gleaming ice cap and flung a playful spray of snow against the exposed lower half of my face. I ran my tongue around my lips, tasting the clear purity of the melting crystals. No sign of life or activity emerged from the glittering spires that confronted us. Neither greeter nor guard emerged from the arched entry of the edifice.

My companion climbed from her seat and vaulted gracefully to the icy suface upon which our craft rested. I followed her, feeling in my bones and sinews the difference in our age. Then, side by side, we made our way to the building.

Before we even reached its portals I said "Irene—what place is this? I thought that we were going to your capitol. Instead we have reached the northern polar cap of the planet, a region always believed uninhabited save for polar bears, seals, and gulls. Yet we find this magnificent structure!

"I beseech you to elucidate!"

She turned upon me the dazzling smile that had melted the hearts and won the applause of audiences the world around and that had brought her to the side of one of the crowned heads of Europe in as dazzling a marriage as the century had seen. "Pray exercise patience for a few more minutes, Doctor. All will be made clear to you once we are inside the Fortress."

"The Fortress?" I echoed helplessly.

"The Fortress of Solitude. The structure, which appears to be part of the ice flow upon which it stands, is actually constructed of marble, pure white marble quarried from a secret deposit and transported here in utmost concealment. Within it are—those who have summoned you. Those whose willing agent it is my honor to be."

We strode beneath towering portals and through echoing corridors until at last we entered a chamber occupied by a single bronzed giant seated in a posture of intense meditation. As we entered the room he seemed momentarily to be stationary, but in a few seconds I realized that he was engaged in a series of the most amazing solitary exercises.

Before my very eyes he made his muscles work against each other, straining until a fine film of perspiration covered his mighty frame. He vocalized softly and I realized that he was juggling a number of a dozen figures in his head, multiplying, dividing, extracting square and cube roots. He turned to an apparatus that made sound waves of frequencies that disappeared beyond the limits of audibility for me, but which he could, from the expression on his face, detect.

At the end of the series he looked up at my companion and myself. In a voice that commanded confidence and obedience he spoke. "Hello, Patricia," he said informally. "I see he came with you. I knew of course that he would."

He rose from his seat and crossed the room toward us, embracing the woman known as The Woman in two mightily muscled arms of bronze. Yet, for all the affection that was visible in that embrace, it was clearly one of brotherly—or perhaps cousinly—fondness; nothing more.

"And you, sir," the bronze giant said, turning toward myself and extending a mighty hand in manly greeting, "you are none other than John H. Watson, MD, are you not?"

I gave him my hand in as strong a grip as I could muster, and will confess that I felt pleased to receive it

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back in one piece, the bones not crushed farther than they were, in the vise-like grip of the man of bronze. "I am indeed. And may I have the honor of your own credentials, sir?"

He smiled most disarmingly and said "Of course, of course. My name is Clark Savage, Jr. I hold a few degrees myself, picked up here and there over the years. Most of my friends just call me Doc. I'd be honored if you would do the same!"

For some reason I felt more flattered than offended by the offhandedness and informality of the man. and agreed to call him by the name he preferred, Doc. "I suppose," I said in reply, "that we might avoid some certain degree of confusion were you to call me what my dearest friend does, simply Watson."

"I'll be happy to do just that," the bronze giant said.

"But did I not hear you address our female companion as Patricia?"

Doc Savage nodded his bushy, copper-colored poll in agreement. "My cousin, you see."

Perturbed, I said "But is she not—" I turned to The Woman and addressed her directly. "But are you not the former Irene Adler, now Her Royal Highness—"

"Please!" the charming young woman interrupted. "To Doc I am known as his cousin, Patricia Savage. To you and your associate, I am known in another persona. Let us leave it at that, I pray you."

Her words puzzled me no end, but I felt that I had no choice under the circumstances in which I found myself than to accede.

"You must forgive me, Watson," the bronze giant said. "My cousin has helped me in a minor deception that was necessary to get you here to my polar Fortress of Solitude. If word had become current in the capitals of the world of the meeting to which you have been secretly summoned, an outbreak of crime unprecedented in the entire history of our planet would be bound to take place."

"You mean—" I stuttered dumbfoundedly, "—you mean that the God of the Naked Unicorn has not been stolen? It is not being ransomed for a sum of eighty trillion grudniks? It is not going to be displayed in St. Wrycyxlwv's Square if the ransom is not paid? This entire proceeding has been a hoax of some sort?"

"Oh, the robbery is real enough, Doctor Watson," The Woman stated. "The God of the Naked Unicorn is missing and everything that I described to you will happen if it is not recovered. But this is only one tiny part of a world-wide threat!"

"Exactly," Doc Savage said. "I have only myself returned from a trek across the earth, escaping the clutches of a fiend unparalleled in the annals of crime. What is taking place here today is nothing less than a council of war, a council of war against one who menaces the orderly structure and just proceedings of the entire world order. Someone whose very identity, no less his base of operations, is a mystery wrapped in a puzzle locked inside an enigma!"

"Well said," I applauded. "But is it just we three who stand between the forces of order and civilization and this fiend?"

"Not we three, Doctor," said The Woman. "I must leave you now. My role has been played, my exit speech spoken. It is time for me to leave the stage of this drama and return to the side of my husband, there to watch and pray for those into whose hands the very fate of the world may have

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been given!"

Once more she exchanged a chaste contact with the man of bronze, then shook my own hand heartily and disappeared from the room. In a moment I heard the sound of her machine as it coughed into life again, then began its steady droning and the *whoop-whoop-whoop* that meant its rotors were spinning, lifting its fabric-covered body into the chilly air above the arctic reaches, and then it faded slowly from audibility.

I stood, alone in the room, with the bronze giant Doc Savage.

"Please come with me, Watson," he said at last. I felt that I had no choice but to obey. Savage strode powerfully to a doorway, adjusted some device which I took to be an automatic guard of a type infinitely more advanced than those I had set in my Limehouse flat, and stood aside as I walked into the next room.

Here I found myself in a chamber that would have done proud the finest men's club of London, Chicago or the European bund of exotic Shanghai.

Wood-panelled walls rose to a magnificently carved high ceiling from which hung old wrought-iron chandeliers. Candles guttered atmospherically while skillfully concealed lights of an artificial nature provided supplementary illumination. The walls were lined with row upon row of books in matched sets of the finest buckram and morroco binding, hand-stamped titles in finest gilt gave back the light of the room.

Across a deep-piled oriental carpet of infinite richness and exquisite workmanship, a small portion of the luxuriantly flagstoned flooring was exposed before the great ornate fireplace where there roared a jolly bonfire of the greatest beauty and the most subtle yet pleasing fragrance.

Overstuffed chairs of rich leather and masterfully carven dark woods stood about the room, and each, save for two conspicuously left vacant, was occupied by a man of imposing mien if slightly eccentric dress.

In one chair sat a muscular figure all in grey. Grey hair, gray complexion, gray tunic and trousers. As I stood, aghast, in the entranceway of the room, he turned dead, cold eyes toward me, taking me in from sturdy British boots to my own faded crop of hair. He nodded curtly, but did not speak.

In the chair beside him sat a man all in black, black clothing swathing him from head to foot save here and there where the scarlet flashing of his clothes was exposed. His collar was turned up about his face and the brim of a black slouch hat was pulled down. Only his brilliant flashing eyes and hawklike nose protruded between brim and collar. With one hand he played with a strange girasol ring that he wore upon a finger of the other.

Next to him was a man with a contrastingly open, boyish expression about his face, blond wavy hair, and sparkling blue eyes. He wore a tight-fitting jersey, tight trousers with a broad stripe running down their sides, and high, polished boots. He somehow impressed me as an American—as, strangely, did most of these men. But this one carried a further, distinctive feeling of being a great college athlete—a Harvard man, I guessed.

Beyond him another young, open-faced individual, this one wearing a red zip-suit that matched his curly red hair. And beyond him two more persons of muscular and athletic build—one nearly naked, clad only on jingling harness and jouncing weapons, the other wearing ordinery

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clothing that looked by far the worse for wear, while he himself seemed strong and competent.

There remained only two others. One was another figure in dark cloak and slouch hat, a figure strangely resembling the hawk-nosed man, save that in this latter case there was no red flashing to relieve the gloomy hues of the clothing he wore, but instead a network of silvery threads that covered his clothing, giving one the uncanny feeling of a gigantic spider's web.

The other was a young man of pleasant mien albeit with a touch of the indolent attitude of the very wealthy. He looked at me with open, friendly expresssion and I was therefore all the more startled to make note of his reversed collar and the monotonous coloration of his rather ordinary looking suit—of mild, jade green!

III.

"GENTLEMEN," I heard Doc Savage say from behind me, "may I present our final member—Dr. John H. Watson, late of 221B Baker Street, London, England.

"Dr. Watson," the bronze giant continued, "won't you walk in and make yourself at home. This is our library. The thousands of volumes that you see lining the walls of this room represent the biographies, published and secret, of the men gathered in this room. Even a few of your own works concerning your former associate have found their way into this room—as has your associate himself on more occasions than one!"

"Holmes—here?" I gasped. "Why, he never told me—he never so much as hinted—"

"No, Watson?" the bronze giant responded. "Did he never tell you of the years he spent in Tibet? Nor of those in the United States under the name of Altamont?"

"Of course!" I smote myself on the forhead with the heel of my hand. "Of course! And I never—"

"Don't be harsh on yourself, Watson. Now that the time has come for you to be of service, here you are at the Fortress of Solitude, and this is your chance to do a favor for the world—and for certain individuals within this world. But first, let me introduce our other members."

He took me by the elbow and I made my way around the circle of easy chairs, shaking hands in turn with each of the men I had previously observed. As I approached each he introduced himself to me:

"Richard Benson—the Avenger," said the man in gray.

"Kent Allard—the Shadow," the hawk-nosed man chuckled grimly.

"Gordon, Yale '34—my friends call me Flash."

"Curtis Newton, sir, sometimes known as Captain Future."

"John Carter, former captain, confederate cavalry."

"David Innes of Connecticutt and the Empire of Pellucidar."

"Richard Wentworth," said the second of the black-clad men, "known to some as the Spider." Even as he shook my hand I detected a look of suspicion and jealousy pass between himself and the man who had identified himself as the Shadow.

And finally, the man in the green clergy suit. "*Om*," he intoned making an Oriental sign with his hands before extending one to me in western fashion. "Jethro Dumont of Park Avenue, New York. Also known as Dr. Charles Pali and—the Green Lama."

"I am honored," I managed to stammer, "I had never dreamed that

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any of you were real persons. I always thought you the figments of fevered imaginations."

"As indeed that same charge has been hurled against your good friend and associate of Baker Street, wouldn't you say, Watson?" It was the bronze giant Doc Savage.

I acknowledged that such was indeed the case. "I am assailed from both sides," I said. "On the one side there are those who maintain that my good friend and associate, whose cases I have chronicled to the best of my mean ability for these many years, is himself a creature of my own fevered imaginings and has no being in the real world at all.

"While on the other hand the gentleman who serves as my own literary agent, Dr. Arthur Conan Doyle, has himself been accused of writing the very narratives which I furnish to him and which he in turn peddles to the magazines in my behalf."

A chuckle of sympathetic agreement made its way around the circle of men in the room. I thought again of the volumes that covered the walls of this library—not one of my companions but whose exploits had meritted the efforts of some chronicler like mine own self, however humble his talents.

"And this band, this assemblage of adventurers—do I see before me the entirety of their sort?" I asked the personages at large as I assumed the rich and comfortable chair offered me by Doc Savage.

Again there was a buzz of low-pitched discussion as the colorfully garbed figures exchanged comments upon my question. Then one of them—I believe it was the Yale man, Gordon—replied in the role of tacitly designated spokesman for them all.

"We hardy few are just the present representatives of a movement whose number is legion. From the days of our founder whose portrait hangs above the fireplace, to this moment, there have been hundreds of us. Their names are inscribed upon the scroll of honor which stands beside the window over there."

He gestured, first toward the painting to which he had referred, then to a tall, narrow window through the thermally opaqued panes of which the long arctic night was beginning to descend. I strode first to stand before the roaring fire and gazed upward at the gracefully executed and richly framed depiction above it. The painter had done his work in rich colors of deep brown, rust, and maroon. The face which gazed back at mine showed strength, intelligence, and a fine tincture of insouciant wit. The costume was that of a French chevalier of a former century. The small engraved plaque beneath the canvas bore but a single word in simple script: *D'Artagnon*.

Paying momentary silent homage to the subject of the portrait I strode across the rich carpet to the scroll previously indicated by the American Gordon. Its headling was a simple phrase the initial characters of which cleverly formed a word of but a single syllable, the relevance of which, I fear I must admit, quite escaped me. The heading of the scroll read Personages United in League as Protectors. The names subtended therefrom were indeed numerous, including not only all of those in the room (myself excepted, of course!) but also many others, of which a random selection included such familiar and unfamiliar appellations as Jules de Grandon, Anthony Rogers, Sir Dennis Nayland Smith, Jimmy Dale, Arsene Lupin, Kimball Kinnison, Nicholas Carter, Stephen

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Costigan and entire columns more.

"A splendid company!" I could not help exclaiming when I had completed my perusal of the gilded scroll. "But if I may make so bold as to ask, how is this establishment maintained? By whose efforts are these facilities operated? Who builds the fire, prepares comestibles, serves libations?"

"Oh, we have flunkies aplenty, Dr. Watson," the young man in the red zip-suit supplied. I identified him at once as Curtis Newton. "Each of us contributes his own staff of assistants to the general service of the League. My own aides include Otho the android, Grag the robot and Simon Wright the living brain."

"And mine," the Shadow stated with a sinister chuckle, "are the playboy Lamont Cranston, the chauffeur Moe Shrevnitz, the communications wizard Burbank and the near-suicide Harry Vincent!"

In turn each of them named a group of bizarre assistants, each as peculiar and eccentric as his employer.

"Each of these," Doc Savage concluded, "serves his time in the kitchen, the armory, or elsewhere in the Fortress and other farflung outposts of the League between assignments in personal service to his respective employer."

"I comprehend," I stated, sipping idly at the beverage which had appeared, all unnoticed, beside my easy chair. I stopped and sniffed, suprised, at the contents of my glass. Sarsaparilla.

"And yet I am puzzled by one matter," I said, addressing myself once more to my hosts at large. In response they looked at me, to a man, with expressions of inquisitive anticipation. "Why," I brought myself at last to ask, "have you summoned me to this redoubt? You are clearly a band of the most capable and dashing of men. I know not what puzzle confronts you, other than the matter of the purloined God of the Naked Unicorn. Surely you do not require my own humble talents in the solution of this, which must pale before your eyes to the pettiest of puzzles."

Once more the chairmanship of the assemblage was assumed by Clark Savage, Jr. He strode to and fro, stationing himself at last before the crackling fire so that the flames, as they writhed and danced behind his heroic figure, cast monstrous shadows across the ornate library of the League. With his feet spread widely, his hands clasped behind his back, his magnificent chest thrown out and his proud head held high, his entire form back-lighted and semi-silhouetted against the dancing flames, he made as glorious a picture of masculine power and grace as ever I had beheld.

"John Watson," he intoned impressively, "what I'm about to tell you is a piece of information of the most sensitive and yet earth-shaking nature. I place you upon your honor as a junior associate of the Personages United in League as Protectors to reveal it to no one until such time as the case has been brought to a triumphant conclusion. Have I your solemn word, John Watson?"

"You have it, sir," I whispered. There was a lump in my throat and my eyes were oddly watery at that moment.

"Very well!" Doc Savage continued, "I must inform you that there is at large an arch-villain whose malific machinations utterly overshadow those of the most infamous evil-doers in the entire annals of the League!"

"Blacker than Cardinal Richelieu!"

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a voice cried out.

"More sinister than the insidious Dr. Fu Manchu!" added another.

"More brilliant than the revolutionist Ay-Artz of the planet Lemnis!"

"More treacherous than Hooja the Sly One!"

"More dangerous than Blacky Duquesne!"

"More ruthless than the master mind Ras Thavas!"

"More threatening than the very Napoleon of Crime himself!" added Doc Savage, bringing the list to a crashing conclusion.

"The Napoleon of Crime?" I repeated incredulously. "You mean—you mean the warped genius Professor James Moriarty? But I thought he was dead—killed in the plunge into Reichenbach Falls!"

"Perhaps he was—and then again, perhaps he escaped, as did his rival and opponent in the epic struggle that had its culmination there in Switzerland. Many a man has seen fit to disappear, and what better hiding place than the grave, eh, Watson?"

Savage was now striding back and forth before the great fireplace, his titanic shadow swaying across the wooden beams and metal chandeliers above our heads. The other men in the room sat silently, expectantly, observing the exchange between their leader and myself. I vowed silently not to fail my absent associate in the upholding of his honor.

"In raising the name of the Napoleon of Crime," I said with some heat, "in making that reference, Doc Savage, you bring by implication the charge that my own associate has somehow failed to rid the earth of this menace!"

"Quite so," Doc Savage stated. "Your associate—Sherlock Holmes—is in the hands of a fiend before whom Professor Moriarty and these other petty peculators pale to a paltry puniness!"

He strode forward and stood over me, towering fully six feet and more into the air. "I am here only because a timely bit of aid by my cousin Patricia caused me to escape the clutches of this arch-fiend! I slipped through his net, but two companions with whom I was pursuing the missing God of the Naked Unicorn were less fortunate than I, and are at this time held in durance vile by the mad genius whose efforts may yet bring the entire fragile structure of civilization crashing to destruction!"

"*Two* companions?" I echoed dumbly. "*Two*? But who can they be?"

He crouched low, bringing his metallic-flecked eyes glimmeringly close to my own and pointed his finger at me significantly. "At this very moment there rest in the clutches of this brilliant maniac both Sherlock Holmes and Sir John Clayton, Lord Greystoke, the man know to the world at large as—Tarzan of the Apes!"

"Holmes *and* Greystoke? At one time? And very nearly yourself as well, Doc Savage?" I exclaimed. "Who can this devil be, and how can I assist in retrieving your associates from his clutches?"

"Wentworth, you are our supreme intellectual!" snapped Doc Savage to the personage in the spider-webbed cloak. "Enlighten Dr. Watson as to our strategy, will you please, while I retire briefly to extract a few square and cube roots?"

Doc Savage retreated to his own seat and the Spider began to speak in a low, insinuating voice that seemed almost to hypnotize the listener.

"This arch-fiend is unquestionably

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the most brilliant and most resourceful opponent any of us has ever faced," he averred. "Yet, Watson, as all who fight crime and anarchy know in the innermost recesses of their being, there has never lived an evil-doer whose warped brain has not caused him to commit one fatal mistake that led to his being brought before the bar of justice and punished sooner or later. Sooner or later, Watson."

"The abduction of Tarzan, Holmes, and Doc Savage was to have taken place at the brilliant Exposition of European Progress where the God of the Naked Unicorn was on display." This was Richard Henry Benson, the Avenger, speaking. He fingered an odd dagger and an even odder-looking pistol as he spoke. "A brilliant replica of the God of the Naked Unicorn was substituted, a substitution that would escape the practiced eye of the most discerning lapidarist, and yet was discovered by a mere woman!"

"Yes, a mere woman!" Captain John Carter took up the narration. "A woman of protean nature whose admirers have identified her variously as the Princess Dejah Thoris of Helium—as Joan Randall, daughter of the commissioner of the interplanetary police authority—as Margo Lane, faithful friend and companion of the Shadow—as Jane Porter Clayton, Lady Greystoke—and as Miss Evangl Stewart of New York City's bohemian quarter Greenwich Village, among others!"

"This woman," Jethro Dumont intervened suavely, "*The* Woman if you will, detected the clever substitution and sought to notify Sherlock Holmes, Lord Greystokes, and Doc Savage. She had alerted both Greystoke and Holmes and was speaking with Doc Savage when the first two members of the League, unaware of the presence of Doc, moved to uncover the fraud and fell into the trap of the archfiend!"

"I moved to their rescue," Savage concluded the tale, "but the evil-doer was prepared! He used the God of the Naked Unicorn to trap Holmes and Tarzan, and using them as bait nearly netted me as well! I escaped with my life and nothing more, and Holmes and Tarzan were spirited away, along with the God of the Naked Unicorn!"

"Then the threat of which Miss—The Woman spoke," I stammered, "the threat to display the God of the Naked Unicorn in St. Wrycyxlwv's Square—was merely a device? A hoax?"

"No, Dr. Watson," the Shadow interposed, "that threat is real, is all too real. But a far greater threat to the order and security of the world is posed by the madman who holds Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan of the Apes in his clutches at this moment!"

"I see, I see," I mumbled in stunned semi-coherency. "But then—then what role have you chosen for me to play in this drama? What can an humble physician and sometime biographer of the great do in this exigency?"

"You," said Doc Savage commandingly, "must solve the crime, rescue the victims, and save the order of world civilization, Dr. Watson!"

IV.

I FUMBLED in my lounging robe for my pipe, shoved aside the futile revolver with which I had foolishly menaced The Woman as she entered my Limehouse flat so seemingly long ago, and began to pace to and fro myself. My mind raced. My thoughts whirled about like bits of flotsam caught in a maelstrom. What would

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Holmes do, was all I could think at that moment, What would Holmes do, What would Holmes do?

At last I halted before Doc Savage and asked "Did the villain leave behind any clew—any scrap of evidence, however trivial or meaningless it might seem to you?"

Furrows of puzzlement and concentration seemed to cut deep grooves into the brow of the man of bronze. At last he said "There may be one thing, Watson, but it seemed so inconsequential at the time that I hardly took note of it, and hesitate to mention it to you now."

"Permit me to be the judge of that, please," I snapped in as Holmes-like a manner as I could muster. To my gratification the man of bronze responded as ever had witnesses under the questioning of Sherlock Holmes.

"The fiend had apparently developed a superscientific device of some sort which reduced the stature of his victims to that of pygmies, and he strode away with poor Holmes under one arm and Greystoke under the other."

"Yes," I said encouragingly, "pray continue."

"Well, Dr. Watson," Savage resumed, "as the fiend left the Exposition of European Progress he seemed to be mumbling something to himself. I could barely make out what it was he was saying. But it seemed to be something like *Angkor Wat, Angkor Wat*. But what could that possibly mean, Watson?"

I smiled condescendingly and turned to the assemblage who sat in awed silence at the confrontation between Savage and myself. By a tacit gesture I indicated that I would accept information from any of them.

"Is it an exotic drug?" one asked.

"The name of the fiend himself?" another attempted.

"A secret formula of some sort?" queried a third.

"Some religious talisman?" "A Princeton lineman?" "The greatest scientist of ancient Neptune?" "An obsolete nautical term?" "The seat of an obsolete monarchy?"

"That's it!" I cried encouragingly. "I knew that the knowledge lay somewhere among you! Angkor Wat is a city lost in the jungles of heathen Asia! We must seek this fiend and his victims in Angkor Wat!

"Quickly," I exclaimed, turning toward Doc Savage, "have transportation made ready at once! We depart for Angkor Wat this night!"

"Can I come along?" the Shadow asked, twisting the girasol ring on his finger.

"No, no, take me!" the Avenger put in.

"Me!" cried Gordon of Yale.

"Me!" shouted David Innes, "I know Tarzan personally!"

Soon they were all jumping from their seats, jostling one another to approach closest to me and squabbling as to which among them should have the honor of accompanying me on my mission to rescue Sherlock Holmes and John Clayton, Lord Greystoke.

"This is a task for Doc Savage and myself alone," I told them as kindly but definitely as I could. "The remainder of you are to remain here and hold yourselves in readiness should there be a call for your services. Now, Savage," I addressed myself to the man of bronze, "have some of those well-known flunkies of your establishment make ready a vehicle suitable for transporting us to the lost city of Angkor Wat in the jungles of the faraway Orient!"

"Yes, sir!" he acceded.

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Firmness, I vowed, would be the salient feature of my modus operandi from henceforward onward.

Within minutes a crew of grotesque creatures had prepared one of the strange flying machines, which Doc Savage informed me were known as autogyroes, with a plentiful supply of reserve fuel, a wicked-looking advanced-design gattling gun, and belts of ammunition. Almost before there was time to shake hands heartily with each member of the League we were leaving behind, Savage and I were airborne over the arctic wastes.

Before many hours had passed, our remarkable autogyro was *whoop-whoop-whooping* its way across the great Eurasian world-island, passing, at one moment, over the very St. Wrycyxlwv's Square where the God of the Naked Unicorn was to be displayed, to the distress of The Woman and the disordering of the stability of European civilization, in what was now little more than twenty-four hours, should Doc Savage and I fail in our mission.

We passed over the Germanic and Austro-Hungarian Empires, the semi-barbarous Slavic states to their east, fluttered dangerously through rigid snow-capped passes in the sinister Ural Mountains and into Asia. Nothing stopped us, nothing slowed us. Savage's flunkies had equipped the autogyro with numerous auxiliary tanks of fuel, and had thoughtfully provided for Savage and myself a huge wicker basket filled with delicate viands.

We passed over teeming Bombay, curved northward tossing clean-picked bones of squab onto the nomad-haunted sands of the Gobi Desert, hovered high above teeming hordes of heathen Chinese as we completed a repast of cold lobster in mayonnaise (dropping the empty carapaces of the aquatic arachnidae into the hands of awed Orientals) and moved at last across the Bay of Tonkin, waving greetings to tramp steamers as they plied their routes, until we came once more over land and I saw far beneath the wheels of the autogyro the green lushness of the ancient jungle.

Shortly my companion and pilot pointed downward toward an opening in the jungle. Through the here-widely-spaced palms I could see the pyramids and temples, collonades and pagodas of an antique metropolis, one lost for thousands of years and only of late rediscovered, to the awe and wonderment of even European scholars.

Doc Savage worked the controls of the autogyro and we dropped, dropped, dropped through the steaming tropical air, until the rubber-clad wheels of the aerial vehicle rolled to a rest atop the tallest pyramid in Angkor Wat.

We climbed from the autogyro and stood overlooking the ancient city. It was dawn in this quarter of the globe, and somewhere a wild creature screamed its greeting to the sun while great cats padded silently homeward from their nocturnal prowls and birds with feathers like brilliant jewels soared into the air in search of tropical fruits upon which to gorge themselves.

"There's only one place in a city like this where a maniac like our foe would make his headquarters!" Doc Savage growled. "That's in the high temple of the sun, and that's why I landed us where I did!"

Through the eerie stillness of the jungle metropolis we made our way down the giant granite steps of the pyramidal edifice, pausing now to gasp in awed admiration of the hand-

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icraft of some long-forgotten Asiatic artisan, now to kill a poisonous serpent, now to pot a brilliant-plumaged denizen of the airy reaches for the sheer fun and sport of it.

At last we reached the earth, and making our way to the grand collonade that gave onto the great chamber of the temple we found the prison-chamber of the arch fiend—but our prey had flown the coop! Savage and I stood aghast at the torture device of the maniac, chilled not so much by its massiveness—for it was smaller than an ordinary kit bag—as by the malignant potentialities revealed in its complex controls.

Clearly the fiend and his victims had been here shortly before us and the villain had fled in haste, abandoning his infernal device as he made good his escape. And yet, the very carelessness exhibited by the malefactor suggested that he owned as bad or worse and was keeping them somewhere other, to which place he had repaired, victims in tow!

Savage and I sprinted back to the autogyro pausing only to ferret out such clews as were required to determine the destination of the fleeing fiend and his captives.

Thus pursued we them from Angkor Wat to bustling, modern Tokio, thence to mystery-shrouded Easter Island where we wandered among the strange monolithic sculptures in bafflement until Doc Savage summoned the talents of the Green Lama by remote communication. That luminary induced one of the weird statues to reveal to Savage and myself that it had observed the fiend and his two captives only minutes earlier than our arrival, departing on a course dead-set for the American settlement of Peoria in the province of Illinois.

We pounded our way across the Pacific, the autogyro's rotors *whoop-whoop-whooping* as we fled from day back into night.

We passed above the gleaming lights of San Francisco harbor, rose to frigid heights as we passed over the Rocky Mountains, dropped low again to wave to a cowpoke here, a sourdough there, as we saw the sun rise once again before we reached Peoria.

Less than a day left to us! My horrified mind's eye pictured the scene in St. Wrycyxlwv's Square and the inevitable disintegration of world order that must follow—especially in the absence of those two saviors of the sane and the normal, Holmes and Greystoke!

Each outpost of the fiend, as we uncovered it, revealed him to have abandoned a similar but more fiendishly advanced model of his infernal torture device, its case glistening, its control panel studded with keys and levers, each marked with some arcane abbreviation of alphabetical or cabbalistic significance known only to the torturer—and, I inferred with a shudder—to Sherlock Holmes and John Clayton!

From Illinois the trail led to an abandoned warehouse located on New York City's lower Seventh Avenue. Here Savage and I found more and different devices of the fiend's trade, and heard a distant door slam at the far end of the building even as our boots pounded angrily after the fleeing maniac.

We pursued him down a long tunnel that seemed to dip and curve away beneath the very bedrock of the Island of Manhattan, then there was a rumble—a flash—an uncanny sensation of twisting and wrenching, and Savage and I found ourselves standing side-by-side outside the very London kiosk where The Woman had brought

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me at the outset of my weird odyssey!

"Where now?" Savage gasped frantically, consulting a chronometer which he wore conveniently strapped to the wrist of one mighty bronze limb.

I thought for a moment, wondering where in the great metropolis the maniac would go. Suddenly I was seized by a stroke of inspiration. I grasped the bronzed giant by one elbow and with him raced to the nearest hack stand where we engaged the second carriage in line. I stammered my instructions to the cabbie and he set off at a rapid clip, the hooves of the horses clop-clopping over the London cobblestones to my great comfort and relief until we drew up before a familiar old building where I had spent many happy years in the past.

I tossed a coin to the cabbie and Savage and I raced up the stairs, hammered frantically at the doorway of the ground story flat, and urged its occupant, the owner and resident manager of the establishment, to join us in our mission above, and to bring her pass key with her as she did so!

As that good woman turned her key in the lock to the upper flat Savage burst open the door with a single thrust of his mighty bronze shoulder and I stepped past him, revolver in hand, and surveyed the scene within.

There I beheld the fiend seated at his infernal machine, operating its keys and levers with maniacal rapidity while upon the table beside him I saw the pitifully shrunken figures of Sherlock Holmes and John Clayton, dancing and twirling with each strike of the keys of the maniac's machine. To one side of the machine stood a huge stack of pages covered with typed writings. To the other stood an even taller stack of blank pages waiting to be covered with words.

A single sheet was in the fiend's machine, and each time he struck a key a new letter appeared upon the page, and with each word I could see the pain upon the faces of the two heroes growing greater as their stature grew less.

"Halt, fiend!" I shouted.

The maniac turned in his seat and leered maniacally up at Savage and myself. His hair was white, his face satanically handsome, yet marked with the signs of long debauchery and limitless self-indulgence.

"So, Savage—" he lipped grimly "—and Watson! You have found me, have you. Well, small good that will do you. No man can stand in the way of Albert Payson Agricola! You have played into my hands! You see—there are your two compatriots. All of the rest in your moronic League will follow! And I alone shall possess the God of the Naked Unicorn," and with that he gestured grandly toward a table on the opposite side of the room.

There, on the very mahogony where my gasogene had stood for so many years between Holmes's violin case and his hypodermic apparatus, there now reposed the silver and gem majesty of Mendez-Rubirosa's masterpiece, the God of the Naked Unicorn!

"And now," Agricola hissed triumphantly, "I shall add two more trophies to my collection of puppets and husks!"

He bent to the keyboard of his infernal device and struck this lever, then that. With each strike I either felt a jolt of galvanic dynamism scream through my own organism or saw poor Savage writhe in bronzed agony.

"Stop it!" I managed to howl at the fiend. "Stop it or—"

(cont. on page 89)

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NEW-WAY-GROOVERS STEW

Grania Davis's first two stories for us were "To Whom It May Concern" (October, 1975) and "It's Hard To Get Into College Nowadays" (February, 1976). She returns with a story about the flowering of the Haight-Ashbury and one of its unforeseen consequences . . .

GRANIA DAVIS

Illustrated by Tony Gleeson

JULE WAS SO amusing that evening. Somewhat tipsy on cognac, he revealed to us (in strictest confidence) the ending of his new novel. The one in which several people disappear, and the only apparant connection between them is that they all corresponded with the same man, a hospitalized quadripaligic! Needless to say, we were spellbound. He also told us that he refused to grant an interview with the reviewer from the New York Times, unless it could be printed in the Woman's Section.

He's always *so* funny, and admittedly, more swishy when he has a new lover. Not that any of them appreciate his wit, his charm, his intelligence. The old fairy usually manages to dig up some tight-assed sailor from the Tenderloin, or a motorcycle freak from one of the leather bars. He buys them new clothes, prepares lavish and tender gourmet meals, and gazes at them with sad, baggy basset-hound eyes, waiting for some small sign that some of the feeling has been appreciated, perhaps even returned. That maybe (but this is really too much to hope for) something might develop. Something permanent, a real relationship with warmth, love. But it never does.

When Jule excused himself for a brief visit to the john, his latest Chuck (or Stud) started eyeballing the prettiest girl in the room, boasting loudly, "I *hate* faggots, and I *hate* this nancy food, and the only reason I'm hanging around with that old auntie, Jule, is cause I'm temporarily short of bread. Soon as I get me a bankroll, I'm getting a big red steak, and some pretty blonde pussy. And all you queers can shove it up your ass!"

No one bothered to tell Jule about this outburst. He's heard it all before. He knows. Eventually, when he had enough brandy to lower the inhibitions, he ran his fingers through his feathery, balding brown hair, grinned sheepishly, and led Chuck (or Stud) to the handsomely decorated nuptual chamber.

And I tried (unsuccessfully) to talk to the most bedable girl in the room. I don't enjoy touching someone I don't know, and besides, there's not

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the same kind of urgency between two women. But (as usual), no spark struck and the party finally broke up. And I went back to my apartment—alone.

A few days later, Jule started showing up at the bars again, cruising. With a big black eye and a thin wallet. Poorer. Sadder. Looking for another Chuck (or Stud) so that he can give another hopeful dinner party to introduce his friends.

We hang out together a lot, Jule and I. We feel real comfortable together, and camouflage each other in the straight world. We don't favor the flaming swish or stomping bull-dyke routines in public. Too conspicuous, too much potential trouble. So when Jule and I are feeling lonely (which is all too often) we go together to quiet ethnic restaurants, plays, movies. Sometimes he gallantly offers to pay my way, but I threaten to slug him in the jaw if he tries. So he shrugs and giggles and pays for himself.

Once we even made a hopeful try at heterosex. Neither one of us is bad looking, even according to straight standards. It was useless. Picture a flaccid white worm trying blindly to find its way into a reluctant wound. Too bad it didn't work, cause there's a lot of affection between us. Maybe we could have lived happily ever after, Jule doing the cooking and taking care of the flat, while I'm off, putting in a hard day at work, delivering mail. It would have been just like *Good Housekeeping Magazine* (with a few minor changes in roles). Too bad it didn't work out. But we've still got our cruising bars and our perpetual shared hope of someday finding—something.

The best cruising bars were in North Beach or the Tenderloin (if you like it tough). There's also Sausalito, if

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you have a car. But in those days, a lot of us lived near Golden Gate Park, and there were a couple of quiet local bars which we enjoyed.

Our neighborhood was quiet and pleasant, integrated and inexpensive. The Haight-Ashbury was its name, and you would never have heard about it except for the sudden influx of hippies which began in the mid-sixties.

At first we were quite delighted with these new additions to our scene. A lot of sweet young asses, trying to escape from middle-class restrictions, and sometimes willing to try our particular avenue of escape—especially in exchange for a good meal and a place to crash. There was an occasional shaggy, budding-author, impressed by Jule's name and willing to "get to know him better" in return for a few crumbs of literary advice and encouragement. And in the meanwhile, his angel faced, pre-Raphaelite chickie, bored and lonely during these literary sessions, would fall under my protective, leather jacketed wing.

Yes, at first we got along quite well with our new neighbors, the gentle young flower-children. (The speed-freaks and the violence were still several years in the future.) And the guiding word (in those days) was *Love*.

By '67, the scene had gone mad. I'm sure you read about it in the press. Teeny-boppers were leaving suburban homes throughout the nation and converging on the Haight-Ashbury. The local stores were being replaced by "head-shops" selling all kinds of far-out, psychedelic gear. The streets were crowded with smiling, flute-playing, flower-throwing, panhandling children. All hoping to open the doors of their minds and to find an alternative to the uptight, materialistic world of their parents.

One of the most positive manifestations of this search for alternative life-styles was soon to be found on a quiet side street, near our favorate local cruising bar. It was an old, abandoned laundry which had been converted into the New-Way-Groovers Free Store. The guiding philosophy of this visionary group was simple. Everyone should be free to groove and do his own thing. Every*thing* should be free to whoever needed it.

The New-Way-Groovers collected odds and ends of clothing, furniture, and household goods and gave them to anyone that wanted it. They formed guerrilla theatre groups and persuaded well-known rock bands to give free concerts in the park. They formed child-care and housing co-ops, and bail funds.

But what really drew the kids to them, made them mommy, daddy, church and sunday-school, and set them apart from all the other do-gooders on the scene, was the stew. Each day, they begged, borrowed and sometimes stole enough used and soggy produce, bread, meat-scraps, beans and what-have-you to put together a huge tin milk can full of watery stew. BRING YOUR OWN BOWL AND SPOON. FREE FOOD. It became the watchword, the communion. As every afternoon, the hungry mind-expanders gathered to partake of the steaming New-Way-Groovers stew.

Jule and I had no desire to become part of the scene. We were far too old, for one thing. And we were too attached to soft sweaters (Jule), and leather jackets (me), to trade them in for raunchy, colorful psychedelic garb. Cognac was our drug of choice, and we were firmly opposed to disturbing the sleeping dogs of our innermost

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psyches with acid, or even pot.

Nonetheless, because it was so near at hand, we could not resist an occasional stop at the New-Way-Groovers Free Store, to peep at all the firm, fresh young bodies doing their thing. And because of our willingness to offer food and shelter to the newcomers, we could not help getting involved.

The Great Summer of Love was rapidly approaching, and the scene was becoming very crowded with wide-eyed, inexperienced, impoverished youthfuls.

"Sign here if you can provide food or crash space for your brothers and sisters," said the notice on the free store bulletin board. So we signed. Jule noted that he only had space for young men, and I noted ditto for young ladies.

A motley selection of drug-freaks, music-freaks, political-freaks, and not too-smart-but-just-wanna-be-where-it's-at-freaks found its way to our respective doors; a parade of pimples, patchouli oil, hysteria and trusting good-will. Food and a little mothering were greatly appreciated, but when it came to the physical side of things, I'm afraid we mostly freaked out the freaks. The kids were cute, but Jule and I were still searching—for something.

One night the bars were quiet, so we dropped into the Free Store, where a formless meeting was meandering on the general topic of Police Brutality. A pretty, dark-haired girl with daisies in her hair was speaking melodically,

"See, we'll form bands of girls to roam the streets, keeping an eye on things, and when the police start acting up, we'll *strip* naked, right out there on the street. That'll distract the pigs so everyone can escape."

"But then the police will turn on us," suggested a horsy, less attractive girl who had already learned that all men did not swoon at the sight of her naked body.

"Why don't we turn them onto *dope*!" cried a pimply young man, "Then they won't *need* to be brutal anymore."

A dark, glowering, curly-haired (perhaps a touch of the tarbrush?) young man, dressed in a poncho, jeans and sandals stood up and angrily surveyed the crowd. He began to rap in a quiet but compelling drawl. "Now look, you folks are having your fun and enjoying your fantasies that the pigs can be won over with love and kindness and a few homemade brownies and naked tits. But lemme tell you, they cannot! How many of you ever been in jail?"

A handful of people raised their hands.

"Well I been in jail," he continued, "*Lots*. First time when I was twelve—slashing tires. Then when I was fifteen—statutory pussy. Again when I was seventeen—robbery. Again when I was eighteen—smuggling coke. Got me three years in the can. I just got out of there a few months ago. I know the pigs, know all about them. Think about it. What kind of person is it that joins the pigs? It's someone who *digs* violence, really digs it! And someone that digs power, really *craves* it. Man, when the cops get their hands on you, they have *total* power. They're totally hostile, totally hating and they can do *anything* they want. If you try to protest then they'll bust your ass for resisting arrest. You other jail freaks, am I right?"

The other jail freaks nodded their heads, while the pretty girl with daisies heaved a firm, bosomy sigh

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and moistened her lips.

"The only thing to do, brothers and sisters," he continued, "is to first avoid letting them get their filthy hands on you, no matter what! And second, to fight them the only way they understand: with hate, with hostility, with violence! Anyone here ever killed anyone, thrown a bomb, handled a machine gun, anything like that?"

No one raised their hands.

"Then man, you can't even *guess* where the pigs' heads are at, or how to fight them. Sometime you're gonna get a knotted feeling in your gut, where you just can't stand the shit they been laying on you all these years. The greed, the hate, the fascist, racist wars and materialism. And you know you got to *do* something about it. Destroy just a little piece of it. Put some of that fear into them like they been putting into you, and show your brothers and sisters the way to freedom!"

To my suprise, Jule stood up, his eyes shining, and interrupted in his slightly falsetto but clear voice, "But my dear young man, don't you see? Violence and hate only breed more violence and hate. And any change in the system which is based on violence and hate cannot be a good and useful change. Don't you realize that *they* have all the guns, all the power? When you speak like that, you are only playing *their* game and giving them another excuse to get their hands on you . . . "

"If you want to make an omelet, you have to break some eggs," called a young Marxist in the crowd.

"Ah," sighed Jule, rubbing his soft, teddy-bear paunch, "perhaps when you reach my age you'll realize that the only omelets of worth are those you make in your own cozy kitchen with mushrooms and herbs."

He giggled and scribbled something on a scrap of paper. "Here, this is my address. Come and share a non-violent omelet with me sometime and we can discuss this further." Jule handed the paper to dark-hair.

"Watch out for that dude," someone called, "he's an old queer!"

Jule smiled sadly and walked out. I thought we'd go on to the bar, but Jule said he was tired. So, after a couple of quiet drinks, I went home to read and have lonely fantasies about a girl with daisies in her hair. There's a lot of fight in me, you know, but there's also a lot of love.

WELL, Dark-Hair must've been hungrier then I thought, because the next night, when I phoned Jule to invite him to a Samurai flick, he cooed happily, "Not tonight, Vic, darling. Some other time. I've got a dinner guest tonight and I'm serving omelets."

After a week or two, I began to suspect that Something Was Going On. Jule was always too busy, or not at home. Sometimes I would see him on the street with Dark-Hair and Daisy and others of the New-Way-Groovers. They were arguing intently, resolving or unraveling the world's problems in a way I don't remember doing since college. Of course most of those kids *were* college age, so that explained it.

Well, I figured the old fairy must be getting something other then a big grocery bill. Surely he couldn't *enjoy* a sophomore debating group.

When he saw me, he waved off-handedly and suggested that I drop by sometime to meet his new young friends. Because I was lonely, and because of Daisy, I finally decided to accept the invitation.

So, that night, I found myself

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knocking on the familiar door. Jule answered. He seemed neither particularly pleased or displeased to see me. He had other things on his mind. "Hi Vic," he said, "come on in and take off your coat. We're having a little chat."

I went in. Dark-Hair (his name turned out to be Tony) was there, and so was Daisy (named Sandra). There were also a handful of other New-Way-Groovers slouching around the well-worn leather chairs.

I sat down next to Daisy/Sandra and tried to draw her out. Her father was a dentist in suburban L.A.. She left home right after high-school graduation because they couldn't relate to her needs. They were sending her a monthly check, hoever, until she could make it as a rock singer. She was seventeen years old.

Oh my aching jail sentence! If there is one thing I will *not* do, it's messing with a girl who's underage. Judges are pretty sympathetic to the consenting adult bit, nowadays. But jail bait is *pure* trouble.

She didn't seem very enthralled by me, so I let our conversation drop in favor of watching the fireworks across the room.

Jule and Tony were dueling verbally and they were drawing blood. As I had seen in the street, these discussions had become the focal point of their relationship. But they had long since left the mundane realm of street politics, and were climbing the Jacob's ladder of philosophic fantasy. Good versus Evil, and that sort of thing. Childish, yes. But Tony (though uneducated) was no mere brainless pair of balls. And Jule, his face excitedly flushed, knew it.

Tony had both the intelligence and intense charisma to draw thoughts and feelings out of the usually frivolous Jule, that surprised us both. And yet they were opposites in every way. Jule was fair. Tony was dark. Jule was soft, Tony was hard. Jule was indolent, Tony burned with energy. Kindly and ruthless, Passive and active. Yin and Yang, Fire and Water. Count Von Masoch and Marquis de Sade.

Daisy leaned over to me and explained, "The thing is, Tony is a Scorpio with Pisces rising, and Jule is a Pisces with Scorpio rising. Tony is 24 and Jule is 42. You see, their egos are perfectly matched and they're tearing each other to shreds."

Well, of course I don't go in for this occult stuff. To me, Tony just looked like a smart young psychopath. And I assumed that Jule was simply putting on an act with the intention of eventually leading the whip-like Tony to bed. Still, the whole thing was compelling in an awful sort of way.

So I showed up the next night. The duel was still going on as though it had never stopped. There were dirty glasses, cigarette butts and food scraps scattered around the end tables.

And the next. As soon as I entered, I sensed that something had changed. Tony was full of fire, his glowing eyes captured the entire room, while Jule seemed haggard and tired and ran his fingers nervously through his hair.

"But there's a higher morality," sighed Jule.

"The highest morality is to take care of yourself," said Tony, in a voice that sizzled with intensity.

Daisy leaned over and whispered to me, "It can't last much longer. One of them will devour the other soon. The I Ching says so."

That seemed overdramatic, yet the atmosphere was awfully tense. Still, knowing Jule (as I *thought* I did), I

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figured that the only devouring that would resolve this debating match, would be that highly delicious and illegal sort that occurs (at its best) between clean white sheets. I eyed Daisy and wished she'd grow up a bit so that I might teach her something about devouring. Feigning an interest in astrology, I asked when her birthday would be. It was only two months away. Not hopeless, not at all.

With that in mind, I showed up for night four of the Great Debate. Things were surprisingly quiet. There was no answer when I knocked at the door. I tried it. It was unlocked. Odd, Jule had too many nice things and the neighborhood was getting too rough for that sort of carelessness.

I went inside. Things seemed terribly disheveled, though Jule was usually a meticulous housekeeper. I looked around and on the desk, I found a hasty and disjointed note addressed to me.

Vic: Must go away. Must have a chance for seclusion and thought. Inform my agent and my bank. Tell them to send all money to my sister in Detroit until further notice. Tell the landlord that I am vacating at once. You can have any of my belongings that you want. Give the rest to the New-Way-Groovers. Affectionately, Jule.

What the hell? Had he gone crazy? A second childhood? Giving up all his possessions to run off and join the hippies, or some fool thing like that? Ha, we'd see how long *that* lasted! If there was one thing Jule loved, it was his comforts. I decided to leave everything just the way it was, at least until the rent was due. Let's give the Prodigal Fairy a chance to return.

And let's get the hell over to the Free Store to see what's going on!

I stamped over there. I was angry as hell and eager to talk some sense into that middle-aged idiot. They were all there, Tony, Daisy. Everyone except Jule.

"Where is he!" I roared.

Tony and Daisy were snuggled up together in the corner surrounded by their usual disciples. That made me ever madder. "It's like this," said Tony, "we're a family, and we make our own morality." They all nodded.

"Don't loose your cool, Vic, baby," drawled Tony, "We aren't his parents. He told us he had to go off and think things over. We don't know any more about it then you. Calm down. Here's an extra bowl and spoon. The stew is just being served. Come and share it with us. Everything free to the people."

Shit. It was obvious that they knew something, and equally obvious that I couldn't bully any information out of them. I decided to calm down, eat some of their goddam stew, and try to get them to confide in me.

They passed me a bowl. I took a bite. Pretty good. Even though I was upset, I realized that his wasn't the usual watery pap they were famous for. A thick, rich broth with chunks of meat (was it pork?) and marrow bones. Had they robbed Jule and dumped his body somewhere? Was that why they were so prosperous, all of a sudden? But nothing had been missing from the apartment that I could see, and that still wouldn't explain the note.

Others in the store were exclaiming over the unusual quality of the stew.

"Oh," laughed Tony, casually, "we ripped off a meat rack. Got ourselves a fat old pig. There's only one morality, and that's to take care of yourself. Dig in, friends."

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Shit, they didn't even *care* that Jule was gone.

IT'S BEEN YEARS now, since he left. Damn lonely years. I never realized before how much I needed his company. Those bastards in the store wouldn't say anything, and there was no point in going to the police. They'd just laugh at a bull-dyke reporting the disappearance of a middle-aged fairy.

After a while the hippie movement grew large, violent, ugly. I finally left the neighborhood and moved to Castro Street, where there's lots of nice new cruising bars. I guess the New-Way-Groovers and their famous stew just faded away.

It's been damn lonely. I'm getting older, getting fatter and I'd like to settle down. Maybe I'll get a dog to keep me company. A big one like a St. Bernard. Maybe I'll name him Jule. And I'm looking for someone to share my apartment. A nice, quiet girl. Maybe I can find one with a kid, one that has been abandoned and is fed up with the tricks of men, but needs someone to take care of her. Maybe I can find someone that's a little older, a little tired. One whose daisies have faded a bit. Maybe I can find one with some love in her heart for an old bag like me. She has to exist—somewhere, if I keep on looking. I'm not too old to develop a relationship. Something permanent. Something gentle, something nice. None of this "devouring" bit.

Only animals eat each other.

—GRANIA DAVIS

Bloody Man (cont. from page 39)

one of yours? "—" *'Yes sir, yes sir,' exclaimed Lt. Cook, as he then was. And, according to local tradition, it was so done. This same Esquire Northrup, on a later occasion, attempting to win a wager as to who in the Settlement could consume the greatest quantity of turtle-soup in the space of one hour's time.*"

Mr. Bustamente was back. "And here is the chart, Mr. Limekiller." Thoughtfully, he rolled it out. It was not, of course, the old archbishop's chart, but it was its twin. Here was the whole coast of British Hidalgo, its reefs and isles and cayes, its bights and bays. And, there in the corner, where the archbishop's hand had rested, concealingly, there—sure enough—engraved: the words, *Jas. Cook, Lt., R.N.*

"It is certainly very old," Mr. Bustamente said. "I would not attempt to clean it, it is so old. Clean it?—why, these drops and splotches, sir, you see, here and there. Don't know what they are . . . Why! Do you know, Mr. Limekiller!—I believe that they may be blood!"

After. . . . how long? A hundred and eighty years? . . . . who could say. However, Limekiller said, "Yes, sir, you may be right." It was chilly, in here. He had found out all that he wanted. He got up to thank Mr. Bustamente, and to leave. The archivist accepted the thanks, walked his guest to the door. "I wonder whose blood it could *be*?" he wondered, aloud. "Eh, Mr. Limekiller? Whose do you suppose?"

Limekiller backed off. "I have no idea," he murmured. Limekiller lied.

—AVRAM DAVIDSON

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Sprague de Camp takes a brief time-out from his popular Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers *column to offer us one of his all-too-rare new stories—this one concerning a lake-dwelling monster known as—*

ALGY

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

Illustrated by JOE STATON

WHEN I PARKED behind my aunt's camp on Lake Algonquin, the first face I saw was Mike Devlin's wrinkled brown one. Mike said:

"Hello, Mr. Newbury! Sure, it's good to see you again. Have ye been hearin' about *it*?"

"About what?"

"The monster—the Lake Algonquin monster."

"Good lord, no! I've been in France, getting married. Darling, this is my old friend Mike Devlin. Mike, my wife Denise."

"Me, I am enchanted, Monsieur," said Denise, whose English was still a little uncertain.

"You got yourself a good man, Mrs. Newbury," said Mike. "I'm after knowing him since he was no bigger'n a chipmunk. Gimme them bags."

"I'll take this one," I said. "Now, what's this about a monster?"

Mike scratched his crisp gray curls. "They do be saying that, on dark nights, something comes up in the lake and shticks its head out to look around. But nobody's after getting a good look at it. There's newspaper fellies, and a whole gang of Scotchmen are watching for it, out on Indian Point."

"You mean we have a home-grown version of the Loch Ness monster?"

"I do that."

"How come the Scots came over here? I thought they had their own lake monster. Casing the competition, maybe?"

"It could be that, Mr. Newbury. They're members of some society that tracks down the shtories of sea serpents and all them things."

"Where's my aunt?"

"Mrs. Colton and Miss Colton are out in the rowboat, looking for the monster. If they find it, I'm thinking they'll wish they hadn't."

Mike took us into the camp—a comfortable, three-story house of spruce logs, shaded by huge old pines—and showed us our room. He pointed at the north window. "If you look sharp, you can see the Scotchmen out there on the point."

I got out the binoculars that I had brought for wild-life watching. Near the end of Indian Point was a cluster of figures around some instruments. I handed the glasses to Denise.

The year before, Mike had been left without a job when my old

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schoolmate, Alfred Ten Eyck, had been drowned in the quake that sank Ten Eyck Island. I recommended Mike to my aunt, whose camp on Lake Algonquin was twenty miles from Gahato. Since my aunt was a widow with children grown and flown, she could not keep up the place without a handy man. Mike—an ex-lumberjack, of Canadian birth despite his brogue—filled the bill. My aunt had invited Denise and me to spend our honeymoon at the camp. Her daughter Linda was also vacationing there.

Settled, we went down to the dock to look for my aunt and my cousin. Several boats were out on the lake, but too far away to recognize. We waved without result.

"Let's go call on the Scots," I said. "Are you up to a three-quarter-mile hike?"

"That is about one kilometer, no? *Allons!*"

The trail wanders along the shore from the camp to Indian Point. When I was a kid there in summer, I used to clear the brush out of this trail. It had been neglected, so we had to push through in places or climb over deadfalls. At one point, we passed a little shed, almost hidden among the spruces, between us and the water.

"What is that, Willy?" asked Denise.

"There used to be a little hot-air engine there, to pump water up to the attic tank in the camp. When I was a kid, I collected wood and fired up that engine. It was a marvelous little gadget—not efficient, but simple, and it always worked. Now they have an electric pump."

Near the end of Indian Point, the timber thins. There were the Scots around their instruments. As we came closer, I saw four men in tweeds and

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a battery of cameras and telescopes. They looked around as we approached. I said: "Hello!"

Their first response was reserved. When I identified myself as Mrs. Colton's nephew and guest, however, they became friendly.

"My name's Kintyre," said one of them, thrusting out a hand. He was a big, powerful-looking, weather-beaten man with graying blond hair, a bushy mustache, a monocle screwed into one eye, and the baggiest tweeds of the lot. The only other genuine monocle-wearer I had ever known was a German colonel, captured in the last month of the war.

"And I'm Ian Selkirk," said another, with a beautiful red beard. (This was before anybody but artists wore them.) He continued: "Lord Kintyre pays the siller on this safari, so he's the laird. We have to kneel before him and put our hands in his and swear fealty every morning."

Lord Kintyre guffawed and introduced the remaining two: Wallace Farg and James MacLachlan. Kintyre spoke British public-school English; Farg, such strong "braid Scots" that I could hardly understand him. The speech of the other two lay somewhere in between. At their invitation, we peered through the telescopes.

"What about this monster?" I said. "I've been out of the country."

They all started talking at once until Lord Kintyre shouted them down. He told me essentially what Mike Devlin had, adding:

"The bloody thing only comes up at night. Can't say I blame it, with all those damned motorboats buzzing around. Enough to scare any right-thinking monster. I've been trying to get your town fathers to forbid 'em, but no luck. The younger set dotes on 'em. So we may never get a good look at Algy."

"Algae?" I said, thinking he meant the seaweed.

"Surely. You Americans call our monster 'Nessie,' so why shouldn't we call the Lake Algonquin monster 'Algy'? But I'm afraid one of these damned stinkpots will run into the poor creature and injure it. I say, are you and your lovely bride coming to the ball tomorrow at the Lodge?"

"Why, my lordship—I mean your lord—"

"Call me Alec," roared his lordship. "Everyone else does. Short for Alexander Mull, second Baron Kintyre. My old man sold so much Scotch whiskey abroad, after you chaps got rid of that weird Prohibition law, that Baldwin figgered he had to do something for him. Now, laddie, how about the dance? I'm footing the bill."

"Sure," I said, "if Denise can put up with my two left feet."

BACK AT THE CAMP, we met my aunt and her daughter coming back from their row. The sky was clouding over. Linda Colton was a tall, willowy blonde, highly nubile if you didn't mind her washed-out look. Nice girl, but not exactly brilliant. After the introductions, my Aunt Frances said:

"George Vreeland's coming over for dinner tonight. Briggs gave him the time off. Do you know him?"

"I've met him," I said. "He was a cousin of my late friend, Alfred Ten Eyck. I thought Vreeland had gone to California."

"He's back and working as a desk clerk for Briggs," said Aunt Frances.

Joe Briggs was proprietor of the Algonquin Lodge, a couple of miles around the shore from the Colton camp, the other way from Indian Point. Linda Colton said:

"George says he's going to get one

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of those frogman's diving suits to go after the monster."

"I doubt if he'll get very far," I said. "The water's so full of vegetable matter, you can't see your hand before your face when you're more than a couple of feet down. When they put in the dam to raise the lake level, they didn't bother to clear all the timber out of the flooded land first."

I could have added that what I had heard about George Vreeland was not good. Alfred Ten Eyck claimed that, when Alfred was in the army, George had rented the camp on Ten Eyck Island from him. While there, he had sold most of Alfred's big collection of guns in the camp to various locals. He pocketed the money and skipped out before Alfred returned. I wouldn't call Vreeland wicked or vicious—just one of those old unreliables, unable to resist the least temptation.

Instead, I told about our meeting the Scots. Linda said: "Didn't you think Ian Selkirk just the handomest thing you ever saw?"

"I'm no judge of male beauty," I said. "He looked like a well-set-up man, with the usual number of everything. I don't know that I'd go for that beard, but that's his business."

"He grew it in the war, when he was on a submarine," said Linda.

Denise said: "If you will excuse me, I looked at Mr. Selkirk, too. But yes, he is handsome. And he knows it—maybe a little too well, *hein?*"

My cousin Linda changed the subject.

AT DINNER TIME, George Vreeland came roaring over from the Lodge in an outboard. He did not remember me at first, since I had met the little man only casually, and that back in the thirties when we were mere striplings.

It was plain that Vreeland was sweet on Linda Colton, for all that she was an inch taller than he. He talked in grandiose terms of his plans for diving in pursuit of Algy. I said:

"It seems to me that, if there is no monster, you're wasting your time. If there is a monster, and you disturb it, you'll probably end up in its stomach."

"Oh, Willy!" said Linda. "That's the way he always was, George, even as a boy. Whenever we'd get some beautiful, romantic, adventurous idea, he'd come out with some common-sense remark, like a cynical old gentleman, and shoot down our beautiful plan in flames."

"Oh, I'll have something to protect myself with," said Vreeland. "A spear-gun or something—that is, if the goddamned Scotchmen don't harpoon the thing first."

"They told me they had no intention of hurting it," I said.

"Don't trust those treacherous Celts. Trying to stop our motorboats, ha! They'd ruin the whole summer-visitor season, just to get a strip of movie film of the monster."

Soon after dinner, my Aunt Frances called our attention to distant lightning. It flared lavender against the clouds, which hung low above the forested Adirondack ridges.

"George," she said, "since you came by water, you'd better be starting back, unless you want Linda to drive you to the Lodge and come back tomorrow for your boat."

"No, I'll be going," said Vreeland. "I have the night duty tonight."

After he had gone, we talked family matters for an hour or so. Then an outburst of yells brought us out on the porch.

The noise came from the direction of Indian Point. I could see little flick-

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ers of light from the Scottish observation post. Evidently the Scots thought they had seen something.

Between flashes of lightning, the lake was too dark to make out anything. "Wait till I get my glasses," I said.

The glasses proved of no help so long as the lake remained dark. Then a bright flash showed me something—a dark lump—out on the lake. It was perhaps a hundred yards away, although it is hard to estimate such distances.

I kept straining my vision, while the three women buzzed with questions. I picked up the thing in several more lightning flashes. It seemed to be moving across my field of vision. It also seemed to rise and fall. At least, it looked different in successive glimpses. I handed the glasses to my aunt, so that the women could have a look.

Then thunder roared and the rain came down. Soon we could see nothing at all. Even the hardy Scots gave up and went back to the Lodge.

WHEN WE AWOKE next morning, it was still raining. We came late to breakfast. When I started to apologize, Linda Colton said:

"Oh, that's all right, Willy. We know that honeymooners like any excuse to stay in bed."

I grinned sheepishly. Denise, who comes of a somewhat strait-laced French Protestant family, stared hard at her orange juice.

That morning, I studied economics for my trust-company job. By noon, the rain had stopped and the skies had begun to clear. When the afternoon turned warm, I suggested a swim. Denise said:

"But, Willy, *mon cher*, if there is a monster there, what if it eats us?"

"Listen, darling, my friends and kinsmen and I have been swimming in these lakes for most of my thirty-two years, and Algy has never bitten any of us. If there is a monster here, it's had plenty of chances.

"Besides, I used to argue with the geology prof at M.I.T. about such monsters. He explained that such a critter needs an area big enough to support the food, such as fish, that it feeds on. Lake Algonquin couldn't support anything much bigger than a snapping turtle. *Il n'y a rien à craindre.*"

"Well then, how about the alligators and crocodiles that you have in the Florida? They do not need a whole sea to live in," she said.

"In the first place," I explained, "they live in interconnected bodies of water, so they can move around from one to another. You need, not just enough area for one, but fifty or a hundred times that much, to support a breeding population. Otherwise, the species dies out. So don't look for a *Plesiosaurus* or a *Mosasaurus* in these lakes. Besides, no alligator—or any reptile of that size—could survive the winters here, where the lakes freeze over."

Denise looked doubtful, but she went swimming. I fear, however, that I do not have enough masochist in me really to enjoy that icy Adirondack water.

When we were dried and changed, we hiked out to Indian Point, partly to warm up and partly to see how the Scots were doing. Present were Frag, MacLachlan, and another man introduced to us as Professor Ballardie. Him I understood to be the big brain of the expedition. They were setting up a searchlight along with their other gear.

"There may be nought to it at all,"

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said Ballardie, a cheerfull little gray-haired man. "But this is the only way to find out."

"Aye," said Farg. "If we dinna try, we sanna learn."

I brought up the arguments of the M.I.T. professor of geology. As I expected, for every argument of mine they had ten counter-arguments. I thought it best to pipe down and listen; after all, I was not selling securities in their enterprise. When Ballardie ran out of breath, I asked:

"Where's Mr. Selkirk?"

"He's off this afternoon," said MacLachlan.

Farg added: "Forbye, he'll be makin' hissell braw for the ba'." At least, that is what I think he said.

MY AUNT decided not to go to the "ba'." George Vreeland came across the lake in his motorboat and carried Denise, Linda, and me back to the Lodge. Since this all happened before the era of youthful scruffiness in the sixties, both George and I had donned coat and tie. While we were still trudging up the path from the Lodge dock, I could hear Lord Kintyre's booming laugh.

Inside, there was Joe Briggs, fat and red-faced, playing the genial host. I saw what Wallace Farg had meant by Selkirk's making himself "braw for the ba'." Selkirk had on a kilt, complete with sporran, dirk in the stocking, and one of those short little jackets with angular silver buttons—the works. Lord Kintyre was similarly clad, although the rest of the Scots made do with their weathered tweeds. We met Lady Kintyre, a mousey little gray-haired woman, and a couple more Scots whom I had not yet seen.

I was struggling through a rumba with Denise when Vreeland and Linda went by. Selkirk stepped up and tapped Vreeland on the arm. "May I cut in?" he said pleasantly.

I doubt if Vreeland even knew about the custom of cutting. While he gaped, Selkirk whisked Linda neatly out of his arms and danced off with her. When we passed them again, he had turned on the charm, whispering in Linda's ear and making her laugh.

After more dances and drinks, Lord Kintyre roared: "Now we'll show you a couple of Scottish dances. Ian, bring the young lady out here to demonstrate."

Selkirk led out Linda Colton. Having enough trouble with dances that I have practiced in advance, I was happy to steer Denise back to the bar. Since Lord Kintyre was paying, and since my Aunt Frances served nothing stronger than sherry, I was glad to wrap myself around some real booze.

There was George Vreeland, sopping up the sauce. His face was flushed, his speech was thick, and his manner was offensive. We avoided him.

We watched the Scottish dances from the sidelines. When it came time to go, Vreeland was not to be found. In the end, Selkirk drove us back to my aunt's camp in one of the expedition's cars. Linda had stars in her eyes when she bid us good-night.

About three in the morning came another outburst of sound from Indian Point. From our windows, I saw nothing except the wavering beam of the searchlight. I was not fascinated enough by lake monsters to get up and go out, but the racket kept up for over an hour. We never did get back to sleep, although I would not say that the time till morning was wasted.

The Scots later said that they had seen Algy again and that he hung

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around so long that they launched a boat to get a closer look at him. Then, however, he dived.

SUNDAY was one of those rare fine days. Denise and I took a hike in the morning and in the afternoon went out on the lake. We had been rowing for maybe half an hour when Denise said:

"There is a canoe, Willy, which comes from your aunt's dock. I think I see the red beard of the Mr. Selkirk."

Sure enough, there came Ian Selkirk and Linda Colton out in one of Joe Briggs's rentable canoes. I waved, but they must have been so absorbed in each other that they never saw us.

When they got closer, I saw that they were in bathing suits. This is not a bad idea, if you want to paddle a canoe without previous experience. Linda, in the stern, was padding and calling out instructions to Selkirk in the bow.

I rested on my oars, watching. After a while, they stopped paddling. I noticed something odd about their position. They had slid off their thwarts and were sitting on the bottom, so only their heads and shoulders showed. They were inching closer to each other, all the while talking and laughing at a great rate.

Denise said: "I think they are about to try *un petit peu de l'amour*."

"It's an idea," I said, "if you remember to keep the weight well down in the boat." I wondered if I ought to try to save my cousin's virtue. This was before the sexual revolution, when many families still took their girls' virtue seriously. But then, I did not even know whether Linda had any virtue to save.

"Well," said Denise, misreading the look on my face, "don't you get any such ideas, my old. Me, I could not enjoy it in a boat for fear of tipping over."

The two were now so close together that Selkirk was embracing Linda. I do not know what would have happened if Algy had not interfered.

Out of the water, on the lakeward side of the canoe and not ten feet from that craft, a reptilian head, as big as that of a horse, arose on a long, thick neck. The head had staring white eyeballs and long white fangs. It rose six feet out of the water and glared down upon the occupants of the canoe.

It took several seconds for the canoeists to realize that they were under observation. Then Linda shrieked.

Ian Selkirk looked around, jumped up, dove overboard, and struck out for shore at an Olympic speed. He left the rocking canoe and Linda behind.

"The dastard!" I said. "I'm going closer."

"Willy!" cried Denise. "It will devour us!"

"No it won't. Take a second look. It's just some sort of amusement-park dragon."

Disregarding Denise's plaints, I rowed towards the canoe. Algy proved a gaudily-painted structure of sponge rubber. I poked it with an oar to make sure and then rowed to the canoe.

Linda was in hysterics, but she calmed down when she saw me. Soon she was paddling the canoe back towards our dock. We followed in the rowboat.

Ashore, we met Mike Devlin. He said: "Mr. Newbury, what's all this about the monster? The young Scotchman is after asking—"

Then two figures appeared running

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on the trail from Indian Point. First came George Vreeland with a bloody nose. After him pounded Ian Selkirk, in swimming trunks and sneakers, howling imprecations in some tongue I did not recognize. It may have been very braid Scots, or it may have been Gaelic. They vanished along the road to the Lodge.

"It's the pump shed," said Mike. "The Scotchman was asking me if there was any such place. I told him yes, and off he went like the banshee was after him."

"Let's go see," I said.

We had to push through heavy brush and second growth to get to the pump shed, for nobody had gone there in years. A canoe was moored at the edge of the water below the shed.

Inside the shed, dust and drifted pine needles lay thick. The old hot-air engine and pump were covered with rust. But something new had been added.

"Mother of God, look at that!" said Mike. "So that's how the young felly had us fooled!"

On the inside wall of the shed were mounted a pair of windlasses. Each consisted of a drum, around which a number of turns of clothesline had been wrapped, and a crank handle for turning the drum. The ropes led out through holes in the wall. They extended to the water's edge and disappeared into the lake on divergent paths.

It was clear what Vreeland had done. He had laid a couple of stanchions—concrete blocks or the like—on the lake bottom, with pulleys or rings stapled to them. The ropes, attached to Algy, led through these stanchions and back to the shed. By turning the cranks, one could make Algy, who was buoyant, rise or sink or, within limits, move horizontally along the surface.

Mike explained: "I heard the racket, and I seen the monster out in the water and the young Scotchman swimming for shore like the Devil was ahint of him. When he climbed out and got his breath, he says: 'It's after me!'

" 'Look, man,' I says. 'Anybody can see 'tis not a real monster at all, with the boats paddling all around it, and it shtanding shtill in the water.'

"So he looks. 'By God, you're right!' he says. Now, this is a smart young Scotchman, and it don't take him ten seconds to figure out wha's happened. 'Quick!' he says. 'Is there any sort of hut or cabin along the shore near here?' So I tell him about the old pump house. 'I'll show you,' I says. 'No, thanks,' he says. 'Just tell me where it is. I don't want any witnesses.' And off he goes. He must have caught Mr. Vreeland just coming out."

Denise went into a fit of giggles until I had to pound her back. *"Comme c'est rigolo donc!"*

EVERY BOAT on Lake Algonquin soon put out for a look at the monster. Selkirk did not succeed in annihilating Vreeland. The latter ducked into the woods and, knowing the terrain, soon lost his pursuer. Hours later, Selkirk, scratched and mosquito-bitten, staggered back to the Lodge. I suppose he felt his loss of face too keenly to show himself, for none of us saw him again.

My cousin Linda accepted neither of these dubious suitors. A year later, she married a rising-young-businessman type.

Next morning I got a telephone call. "Mr. Wilson Newbury, please. . . . Oh, is that you, Willy? Alec Kintyre here. I say, Willy, could

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you do me a favor? My lads have packed up all our gear to leave, but I want to go over the ground once more with someone who knows it. Could you. . . ."

Half an hour later, I was showing Lord Kintyre the shed in which Vreeland had set up his control mechanism.

"You know," said Lord Kintyre, "it was all Briggs's doing."

"How so?"

"When Vreeland came in this morning, he and Briggs got into a blazing quarrel, and Vreeland blew the gaff. Seems Briggs hired him last spring to set up this hoax, to draw more summer trade. It did, too.

"They might have got away with it, since Vreeland was supposed to surface the bloody monster only at night. He'd paddle over in that canoe so the noise of his motorboat wouldn't give him away. Everybody knew he was a damned stinkpot fanatic, so nobody suspected him of being a canoeist.

"Ian Selkirk spoilt the scheme. Vreeland was so eager to do Ian one in the eye that he brought up Algy in broad daylight. Then it took only a good second look to show it was a fake. The lads on the point realized that when they got their telescopes on it.

"Rum thing about Ian. He's not really a coward—he was in submarines with me during the war—but just this once he panicked. He didn't even wait to help with the packing but left last night. Trouble with Ian is, all he thinks of is dipping his wick. Now could we go out for a look at Algy?"

I took Lord Kintyre out in the Colton rowboat. We circled Algy, who was still sitting in the water as he had been left.

Algy consisted of the head, six feet of neck, and an egg-shaped body without limbs, save for a kind of rudder aft. This fin made the monster face forward when towed through the water, so that Vreeland could parade the thing back and forth, as far as his rope tackle allowed.

The last Scots had left Indian Point with their apparatus. We moved up close to Algy, and Lord Kintyre took out a pocket knife. "I'll cut a little piece off as a souvenir, if you don't mind," he said.

He got his piece of sponge rubber, and we started back. Then I said: "Hey, Alec! Look around!"

Something was happening to Algy. He was moving back and forth by jerks, stirring the water to foam. The jerks became wider and more violent. Have you ever seen a dog shake a squirrel or similar small prey to death? Algy was moving as if he had been seized from below and was being thus shaken. The boat rocked in the waves. Lord Kintyre's monocle fell out and dangled on its string. Algy was drawn down until he almost disappeared.

Then the water quieted. Algy bobbed up again—but in pieces. We sat quietly, afraid (at least I was) to move or speak, lest whatever had mangled Algy came for us.

When nothing more happened, I took a few cautious strokes towards the scene of the disturbance, backing water so that I could pull for shore in a hurry. I fished out a piece of blue-green sponge rubber, the size of my foot. I think it came from Algy's neck.

Lord Kintyre replaced his eyeglass and sighed. "Just my damned luck," said said, "to be without camera or other equipment."

"Are you going to call your boys back, to start watching again?"

"No. Some have already left for home, and the rest are all packed up.

(cont. on page 89)

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The Dragon

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THE STAIRS IN THE CRYPT

CLARK ASHTON SMITH & LIN CARTER

Lin Carter, working from Clark Ashton Smith's extensive legacy of notes, outlines, lists of titles and story-fragments, has collaborated posthumously with Smith (who died in 1961), creating new stories—two of which appeared in the briefly-revived Weird Tales, *and the third, "The Scroll of Morloc", here (October, 1975). Here is the fourth.*

Illustrated by Richard Olsen

It is told of the necromancer Avalzaunt that he succumbed at length to the inexorable termination of his earthly existence in the Year of the Crimson Spider during the empery of King Phariol of Commoriom. Upon the occasion of his demise, his disciples, in accordance with the local custom, caused his body to be preserved in a bath of bituminous natron, and interred the mortal remains of their master in a mausoleum prepared according to his dictates in the burying-grounds adjacent to the abbey of Camorba, in the province of Ulphar, in the eastern parts of Hyperborea.

The obsequies made over the catafalque whereupon reposed the mummy of the necromancer were oddly cursory in nature, and the enconium delivered at the interment by the eldest of the apprentices of Avalzaunt, one Mygon, was performed in a niggardly and grudging manner, singularly lacking in that spirit of somber dolence one should have expected from bereaved disciples gathered to mourn their deceased mentor. The truth of the matter was that none of the former students of Avalzaunt had any particular cause to bemoan his demise, for their master had been an exigeant and rigorous taskmaster and his cold obduracy had done little to earn him any affection from those who had studied the dubious and repugnant science of necromancy under his harsh and unsympathetic tutelage.

Upon their completion of the requisite solemnities, the acolytes of the necromancer departed for their ancestral abodes in the city of Zanzonga which stood nearby, whilst others eloigned themselves to more distant Cerngoth and Leqquan. As for the negligent Mygon, he repaired to the remote and isolated tower of primordial basalt which rose from a headland overlooking the boreal waters of the eastern main, from which they had all

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come for the funereal rites. This tower had formerly been the residence of the deceased necromancer but was now, by lawful bequest, devolved upon himself as the seniormost of the apprentices of the late and unlamented mage.

If the pupils of Avalzaunt assumed that they had taken their last farewells of their master, however, it eventuated that in this assumption they were seriously mistaken. For, after some years of repose within the sepulchre, vigor seeped back again into the brittle limbs of the mummified enchanter and sentience gleamed anew in his jellied and sunken eyes. At first the partially-revived lich lay somnolent and unmoving in a numb and mindless stupor, with no conception of its present charnel abode. It knew, in fine, neither what nor where it was, nor aught of the peculiar circumstances of its untimely and unprecedented resurrection.

On this question the philosophers remain divided. One school holds to the theorem that it was the unseemly brevity of the burial rites which prevented the release of the spirit of Avalzaunt from its clay, thus initiating the unnatural revitalization of the cadaver. Others postulate that it was the necromantic powers inherent in Avalzaunt himself which were the sole causative agent in his return to life. After all, they argue, and with some cogence, one who is steeped in the power to effect the resurrection of another should certainly retain, even in death, a residue of that power sufficient to perform a comparable revivification upon oneself. These, however, are queries for a philosophical debate for which the present chronicler lacks both the leisure and the learning to pursue to an unequivocal conclusion.

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Suffice it to say that, in the fulness of time, the lich had recovered its faculties to such a degree as to become cognizant of its interment. The unnatural vigor which animated the corpse enabled it to thrust aside the heavy lid of the black marble sarcophagus and the mummy sat up and stared about itself with horrific and indescribable surmise. The withered wreaths of yew and cypress, the decaying draperies of funereal black and purple, the sepulchral décor of the stone chamber wherein it now found itself, and the unmistakable nature of the tomb-furnishings, all served alike to confirm the reanimated cadaver in its initial impressions.

It is difficult for we, the living, to guess at the thoughts which seethed through the dried and mould-encrusted brain of the lich as it pondered its demise and resurrection. We may hazard it, however, that the spirit of Avalzaunt quailed before none of the morbid and shuddersome trepidations an ordinary mortal would experience upon awakening within such somber and repellent environs. Not from shallow impulse or trivial whim had Avalzaunt in his youth embarked upon a study of the penumbral and atrocious craft of necromancy, but from a fervid and devout fascination with the mysteries of death. In the swollen pallor of a corpse in the advanced stages of decomposition had he ever found a beauty superior to the radiance of health, and in the mephitic vapors of the tomb a perfume headier than the scent of summer gardens.

Oft had he hung in rapturous excitation upon the words which fell, slow and sluggish, one by one, from the worm-fretted lips of deliquescent cadavers, or gaunt and umber mummies, or crumbling lichs acrawl with squirming maggots and teetering on the sickening verge of terminal decay. From such, rendered temporarily animate by his necromantic art, it had been his wont to extort the abominable yet thrilling secrets of the tomb. And now he, himself, was become just such a revitalized corpse! The irony of the situation did not elude the subtlety of Avalzaunt.

"Once I yearned to know the terrors of the grave, the kiss of maggots on my tongue, the clammy caress of a rotting shroud against my tepid flesh," soliloquized the cadaver in a croaking whisper from a dry and shrunken throat crusted with the salts of the bitter natron. "I thirsted for the knowledge that glimmers in the pits of mummied eyes, and burned for that wisdom known only to the writhing and insatiable worm. Tirelessly I perused forbidden tomes by the wan and feeble luminance of guttering tapers of corpse-tallow to master the secrets of mortality, so that should ever the nethermost pits disgorge their crawling vermin I might aspire to dominion and empery over the legions of the living dead—among the which I, now, myself, am to be henceforward numbered!"

Thus it may be seen that the mordant humor in its present circumstances was readily perceived by the unblunted wit of the revitalized corpse.

AMONG the various implements of arcane manufacture which the pupils of Avalzaunt had buried in the crypt beside the mortal remains of their unlamented master there was a burnished speculuum of black steel wherein presently the cadaver of Avalzaunt beheld its own repulsive likeness. It was skull-like, that sere and fulvous visage which peered back at

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the necromancer from the ebon depths of the magic mirror. Avalzaunt had seen such shrunken and decayed lineaments oft aforetime upon prehistoric mummies rifled from the crumbling fanes of civilizations anterior to his own. Seldom, however, had the reanimated lich gazed upon so delightfully decomposed and withered a visage as this bony and wizened horror which was its own face.

The lich next turned its rapt scrutiny on what remained of its lean and leathery body and tested brittle limbs draped in the rags of a rotting shroud, finding these embued with an adamantine and a tireless vigor, albeit they were gaunt and attenuated to a degree which may only be described as skeletal. Whatever the source of the supranormal energy which now animated the corpse of the necromancer, it lent the undead creature a vigor it had never previously enjoyed in life, not even in the long-ago decades of its juvenescence.

As for the crypt itself, it was sealed from without by pious ceremonials which rendered the portals thereunto inviolable by the mummy in its present mode of existence as one of the living dead. Such precautions were customery in the land of Ulphar, which was the abode of many warlocks and enchanters during the era whereof I write; for it was feared that wizards seldom lie easy in their graves and that, betimes, they are wont to rise up from their deathly somnolence and stalk abroad to wreak a dire and ghastly vengeance upon those who wronged them when they lived. Hence was it only prudent for the timid burghers of Zanzonga, the principal city of this region of Hyperborea, to insist that the tombs of sorcerors be sealed with the Pnakotic pentagram, against which such as the risen Avalzaunt may not trespass without the severest discomfiture.

Thus it was that the mummy of the necromancer was pent within the crypt, helpless to emerge therefrom into the outer world. And there for a time it continued to sojourn: but the animated lich was in no wise discommoded by its enforced confinement, for the bizarre and ponderous architecture of the crypt was of its own devisal, and the building thereof Avalzaunt had himself supervised. Therefore it was that the crypt was spacious and, withal, not lacking in such few and dismal amenities as the reposing-chambers of the dead may customarily afford their ghastly habitants. Moreover, the living corpse bethought itself of that secret portal every tomb is known to have, behind the which there doubtless was a hidden stair went down to black, profound, abysmal deeps beneath the earth where vast, malign and potent entities reside. The Old Ones they are called, and among these inimical dwellers in the tenebrous depths there was a certain Nyogtha, a dire divinity whom Avalzaunt had oftentimes celebrated with rites of indescribable obscenity.

This Nyogtha had for his minions the grisly race of Ghouls, those lank and canine-muzzled prowlers among the tombs; and from the favor of Nyogtha the necromancer had in other days won ascendancy over the loping hordes. And so the mummy of Avalzaunt waited patiently within the crypt, knowing that in time all tombs are violated by these shambling predators from the Pit, who had been the faithful servants of Avalzaunt when he had lived, and who might still consent to serve him after death.

Erelong the cadaver heard the shuf-

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fle of leathery feet ascending the secret stair from the umplumbed and gloomy foetor of the abyss, and the fumbling of rotting paws against the hidden portal; and the stale and vitiated air within the vault was, of a sudden, permeated with a disquieting effluvia as of long-sealed graves but newly opened. By these tokens the lich was made aware of the Ghoul-pack that pawed and whined and snuffled hungrily at the door. And when the portal yawned to admit the gaunt, lean-bellied, shuffling herd, the lich rose up before it, lifting thin arms like withered sticks and clawed hands like the stark talons of monstrous birds. The putrid witchfires of a ghastly phosphorescence flared up at the command of the necromancer, and the Ghoul-herd, affrighted, squealed and grovelled before the glare-eyed mummy. At length, having cowed them sufficiently, Avalzaunt elicited from the leader of the pack, a hound-muzzled thing with dull eyes the hue of rancid pus, a fearful and prodigious oath of thralldom.

It was not long thereafter before Avalzaunt had need of this loping herd of grave-robbers. For the necromancer in time became aware of an inner lack which greatly tormented it and which ever remained unassuaged by the supernatural vigor which animated its form. In time this nebulous need resolved itself into a gnawing lack of sustenance, but it was for no mundane nutriment, that acrid and raging thirst which burned within the dry and withered entrails of the lich. Cool water nor honey-hearted wine would not suffice to sate that unholy thirst: for it was *human blood* Avalzaunt craved, but why or wherefore, the mummy did not know.

Perchance it was simply that the dessicated tissues of the lich were soaked through with the bituminous salts of the bitter natron wherein it had been immersed, and that it was this acid saltiness which woke so fierce and burning a thirst within its dry and dusty gullet. Or mayhap it was even as antique legends told, that the restless legions of the undead require the imbibement of fresh gore whereby to sustain their unnatural existence on this plane of being. Whatever may have been the cause, the mummy of the dead necromancer yearned for the foaming crimson fluid which flows so prodigally through the veins of the living as it had never thirsted for even the rarest of wines from terrene vinyards when it had lived. And so Avalzaunt evoked the lean and hungry Ghouls before its bier. They proffered unto the necromancer electrum chalices brimming with black and gelid gore drained from the tissues of corpses; but the cold, thick, coagulated blood did naught to slake the thirst that seared the throat of the mummy. It longed for fresh blood, crimson and hot and foam-beaded, and it vowed that erelong it would drink deep thereof, again and again and yet again.

THEREAFTER the shambling herd roamed by night far afield in dire obedience to the mummy's will. And so it came to pass that the former disciples of the necromancer had cause to regret the negligent and over-hasty burial of their unlamented mentor. For it was upon the acolytes of the dead necromancer whom the Ghoul-horde preyed. And the first of all their victims was that unregenerate and niggardly Mygon who still dwelt in the sea-affronting tower which once had been the demesne of the necromancer. When, with the diurnal light, his servants came to rouse him from

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his slumbers, they found a blanched and oddly-shrunken corpse amidst the disorder of the bedclothes, which were torn and trampled and besmirched with black mire and grave-mould. Naught of the nature of the nocturnal visitants to the chamber of the unfortunate Mygon could his horror-stricken servants discern from the fixed staring of his glazed and sightless eyes; but from the drained and empty veins of the corpse, and its preternatural pallor, they guessed it that he had fallen victim to some abominable and prowling vampire in the night.

Again and again thereafter the Ghoul-herd went forth by the secret stairs within the crypt of Avalzaunt, down to those deeps far beneath the crust of the earth where they and their brethren had anciently tunneled out a warren of fetid passageways connecting tomb and burial-ground and the vaults beneath castle, temple, tower and town. After nine such grisly atrocities had befallen, some vague intimation of the truth dawned upon the ecclesiarchs of Zanzonga, for it became increasingly obvious that only the former apprentices of the dead necromancer, Avalzaunt, suffered from the depredations of the unknown vampire-creatures. In time the priests of Zanzonga ventured forth to scrutinize the crypt of the deceased enchanter, but found it still sealed, its door of heavy lead intact, and the Pnakotic pentagram affixed thereto undisturbed and unbroken. The night-prowling monsters who drained their hapless victims dry of blood, whoever or whatever they might prove to be, had naught to do with Avalzaunt, surely; for the necromancer, they said, slept still within his sealed and shutten crypt. This pronunciamento given forth, they returned to the temple of Shimba in Zanzonga, pleasently satisfied with themselves for the swift and thorough fulfillment of their mission. Not one of them so much as suspected, of course, the very existence of the stairs in the crypt, whereby Avalzaunt and his Ghouls emerged in the gloaming to hunt down the unwary and abominably to feast.

And from this vile nocturnal feast the sere and withered mummy lost its aforetime gauntness, and it waxed sleek and plump and swollen, for that it now gorged heavily each night on rich, bubbling gore; and, as is well known to those of the unsqueamish who ponder upon such morbidities, the undead neither digest nor eliminate the foul and loathly sustenance whereon they feed.

Erelong the now bloated and corpulent lich had exhausted the list of its former apprentices, for not one remained unvisited by the shamblers from the Pit. Then it was that the insatiable Avalzaunt bethought him of the monks of Camorba whose abbey lay close by, nigh unto the very burial-ground wherein it was supposed he slept in the fetid solitude of his crypt. These monks were of an order which worshipped Shimba, god of the shepherds, and this drowsy, rustic little godling demanded but little of his celebrants; wherefore they were an idle, fat, complacent lot much given to the fleshly pleasures. 'Twas said they feasted on the princeliest of viands, drank naught but the richest of vintages, and dined hugely on the juiciest and most succulent haunches of rare, dripping meat; by reason thereof they were rosey and rotund and brimming with hot blood. At the very thought of the fat, bubbling fluid that went rivering through their soft, lusty flesh, the undead nec-

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romancer grew faint and famished: and he vowed that very night to lead his loping tomb-hounds against the abbey of Camorba.

NIGHT fell, thick with turgid vapors. A humped and gibbous moon floated above the vernal hills of Ulphar. Thirlain, abbot of Camorba, was closeted with the abbey accounts, seated behind a desk lavishly inlaid with carven plaques of mastodonic ivory, as the moon ascended towards the zenith. Rumor had not exaggerated his corpulence, for, of all the monks of Camorba, the abbot was the most round and rubicund and rosy; hence it was from the fat jugular that pulsed in his soft throat that the necromancer had sworn to slake his febrile and unwholesome thirst.

In one plump hand Thirlain held a sheaf of documents appertaining to the accounts of the abbey, the which were scribed upon crisp papyrus made from calamites; the pudgy fingers of the other hand toyed idly with a silver paperknife which had been a gift from the high priest of Shimba in Zanzonga, and which was sanctified with the blessings of that patriarch.

Thus it was that, when the long becurtained windows behind the desk burst asunder before the whining, eager pack of hungry Ghouls, and the swollen and hideously bloated figure of the mad-eyed cadaver which led the tomb-hounds came lurching toward the abbot where he sat, Thirlain, shrieking with panic fear, blindly and impulsively thrust that small blunt silver knife into the distended paunch of the lumbering corpse as it flung itself upon him. What occurred in sequel to that instinctive and, ordinarily, ineffectual blow is still a matter of theological debate among the ecclesiarchs of Zanzonga, who no longer sleep so smugly in their beds.

For the bloated and swollen paunch of the walking corpse burst open like an immense and rotten fruit, spewing forth such stupendous quantities of black and putrid blood that the silken robes of the abbot were drenched in an instant. In sooth, so voluminous was the deluge of cold, coagulated gore, that the thick carpets were saturated with stinking fluids, which sprayed and squirted in all directions as the stricken cadaver staggered about in its throes. The vile liquid splashed hither and yon in such floods that even the damask wall-coverings were saturated, and, in no time at all, the entire chamber was awash with putrescent gore to such an extent that the very floor was become a lake of foulness. The liquescent vileness poured out into the hallways and the corridors beyond when at length the other monks, roused by the shriekings of their horror-smitten abbot, rose from cot and pallet and came bursting in to behold the ghastly abbatial chamber floating in a lake of noisome slime and Thirlain himself crouched pale and gibbering atop his ivory desk, pointing one palsied hand at the thin and lean and leathery rind of dried and dessicated flesh that was all which remained of Avalzaunt the necromancer, once the vile fluids his mummy retained had burst forth in a grisly deluge, and drained him dry.

This horrendous episode was hushed up and only distorted rumors of the nightmare ever leaked beyond the abbey walls. But the burghers of Zanzonga marveled for a season over the swift and inexplicable resignation from his fat and cozy sinecure of the complacent and pleasure-loving Thirlain, who departed that very dawn on a barefoot pilgrimage to the remotest of holy shrines far-famed for its

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wonder-working relics, which was situate amidst the most hostile and inaccessible of wildernesses. Thereafter the chastened abbot entered a dour monastic order of stern flagellants, famed for their strict adherence to a grim code of the utmost severity, wherein the all but hysteric austerities of the zealous Thirlain, together with his over-rigorous chastisements of the flesh, made him an object of amazement and wonder among even the harshest and most obdurate of his brethren. No longer plump and soft and self-indulgent, he grew lean and sallow from a bleak diet of mouldy crusts and stale water, and died not long thereafter in the odor of sanctity and was promptly declared venerable and beatific by the Grand Patriarch of Commoriom, and his relics now command excessive prices from the dealers in such ecclesiastical memorabilia. As for the remains of the necromancer, they were burnt on the hearth of the abbey at Camorba and were reduced to a pinch of bitter ash which was hastily scattered to the winds. And it is said of the spirit of the unfortunate Avalzaunt, that at last it found rest in whatever far and fabulous bourn is the final haven of perturbed and restless spirits.

—CLARK ASHTON SMITH
& LIN CARTER

God of Naked (cont. from page 61)

He struck still another key. SUDDENLY I FELT HUGELY MAGNIFIED AND EMPOWERED! I JERKED THE TRIGGER OF MY REVOLVER AND ALBERT PAYSON AGRICOLA FLUNG HIS ARMS OUTWARD! HIS ELBOW STRUCK a lever on the machine and I returned to normal. I saw Doc Savage at my side massaging his painfully twisted limbs. I saw Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan of the Apes beginning with infinite slowness and yet by perceptible degrees to regain their proper form and stature.

Albert Payson Agricola fell to the carpet, a hole neatly drilled between his eyes.

From the wound there seemed to flow neither blood nor spattered brains but shred after shred of dry, yellow, smearily imprinted wood pulp paper.

—OVA HAMLET

Algy (cont. from page 80)

We've spent enough money and got enough material for our report to the Society, Someone else will have to chase the real Algy."

In the years since then, I have heard of no further mysterious phenomena on Lake Algonquin. But, although I have been back there several times, I have always found some excuse for not going swimming.

—L SPRAGUE DE CAMP

ON SALE IN AMAZING SEPT
THE DREAM LIONS by JACK DANN, NOBODY LEAVES NEW PITTSBURG by GEORGE R.R. MARTIN, WILDERNESS by FRED SABERHAGEN, MRS. T. by LISA TUTTLE, SALTY FOR THE CAT by CHARLES V. DE VET, DREAM OF TRUMPETERS by DRUSILLA NEWLON CAMPELL, TWO OF A KIND by RICHARD W. BROWN, TIME TO KILL by ELINOR BUSBY plus many new features

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THE ATHELING'S WIFE

This story is a direct sequel to the author's "Fugitives in Winter" (October, 1975), but unlike that story this one is told third-person. As More explains it, "To write in the first-person about a sixth-century Celtic bard, even a fantasized one, is something I just couldn't keep up. And it's easier to juggle a number of characters this way." He adds, "The bard's weapon was named Kincaid in the first story. This was meant to be an Anglicized version of Cinncait, the Gaelic for Cat's Head *or* Cat-headed One, *but in this story I've translated it directly into English and abbreviated it to Cat." We have more stories of Felimid the Bard coming up and I confidently predict that this is one series you'll want to follow in issues to come!*

DENNIS MORE

Illustrated by Steve Fabian

I

Who can open the doors of his face?
His teeth are terrible round about.
His scales are his pride,
Shut up together as with a close seal.
Job 41, 14–15

FOR ONCE in his life Felimid mac Fal took the open and simple way. He'd lately had all he wanted of devious designs, and more. They weren't worth the trouble they caused. In the end a man found himself depending as much on luck as if he'd acted with no forethought at all. Honesty was best. In this incredible mood he rode south from the hollow husk of Venta to the dun of King Cerdic.

A conqueror pirate was Cerdic, a half-Jute from Kent whose mother had been as British as his name. He'd risen from nothing to become a chieftain and take the Isle of Vectis with five ships. For years and years after, he'd held it against all comers while raiding widely himself. Then his long war-boats had raged up Vectis Water to sack Hamo's Port, and later he'd met and killed the British king Natanleod in a battle at Charford. He might have gone further, but the breaking of their vast combined host at Badon had given the sea-wolves pause, and for now he seemed content to hold Vectis and his footing on the mainland. He called his sword-won kingdom Westri, because no Jute or Saxon had yet conquered more in that direction.

That was almost all Felimid knew about him.

There had been light rain, and odd masses of cloud were piled in the sky like shorn fleeces, dazzling above, purple, grey and dingy yellow below. Between them arched the banded

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curve of a rainbow. The sea-wolves believed it was the bridge to Wotan's hall where dead heroes bragged and sang and quarreled as in life. Maybe it was an omen that it seemed to end at Cerdic's very door.

Omens! The river ran clear and the ford was shallow, free from obstruction. A swineherd in a calf's louse-ridden hide crossed from the forest with the king's grunting porkers, and turned a shaggy head to gape briefly at the stranger. But briefly, briefly. It did not become a slave to be curious.

The bard followed him across, after shouting aloud three times as the Jutish custom demanded. He could not now be accused of approaching by stealth.

Below this place the river widened into an estuary. The palisade of Cerdic's dun dominated a town of thatched sunken-floored houses, and moored at timber jetties were war-boats with copper-sheathed prows, just out of their winter quarters. There had been stone quays once. The Jutes had destroyed them stone by stone with immense labour because they feared the Roman magic that might linger in them. Felimid knew better. The Roman way had been unalterably opposed to magic.

Ten thousand butchered Druids said so.

Within the palisade were the common byres, barns and outbuildings; but Cerdic's great hall was not common at all. When he took Hamo's Port, which his people called Hampton, he'd sworn to build a hall that outshone Othgar the Dane's gleaming marvel. He may have done. Felimid was not then so widely travelled that he could say. But what he saw awed him.

The walls were gigantic timbers adzed and fitted together like the ribs of a ship. The corner-posts were carved like frowning gods, and it would have taken three men to stretch their arms around one. The roof was tiled with scales a foot across, from a sea-dragon the king had hunted down. They glittered like beaten metal; green shading into grey at the edges. Felimid could have ridden through the doors without ducking the lintel, and a comrade could have gone either side of him without scraping the posts. The doors themselves were sheathed in bronze, with silvered iron hinges marvellously wrought. Hinges long as he was tall, nearly.

The double portal, huge as it was, was framed in the naked white skull and jaws of the sea-dragon whose scales covered the roof. Teeth half as long as a man's arm shone like white salt. Bereft sockets under blunt bone ridges were caves of deep shadow. They seemed to glare with menace yet. The notion of riding under them did not enchant Felimid even as an image.

Dogs clamoured and snapped about his gelding's feet. Retainers from the bench before the hall beat them away with sticks, and a spear-bearing warrior with a forked beard asked him his name and station.

'Felimid of Erin am I,' said the bard in the man's own tongue, fluent as if he'd been born to the speaking of it. 'From beyond the sea and across the Cymric kingdoms have I been drawn by word of King Cerdic's might and magnificence, and the welcome it's said that a roving scop or gleeman can find by his hearth. Of his might and magnificence I see there was not a word of exaggeration said.'

'My lord's not one to turn away a singer, true. And he'd wish someone to see to your horse. Some British thrall about the place will know how.'

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'I'll see to him,' Felimid said, amused by the warrior's belief that such work was beneath a freeman. The white horse might be the badge of Hengist's house, and the Jutish war-standard a pole hung with horsetails, but they were not an equestrian people. Few of them could get on a horse's back if they were not helped, or keep from falling off again at a slow walk. The bard wasn't prepared to trust the gelding to a stranger, or a stranger to the gelding, for he was likely to lose an arm and then the bard would have to compensate his master. He stabled the brute and saw him fed.

Later he sat at a lowly place in Cerdic's hall. He didn't object to that, for he wasn't much concerned with rank or precedence and seldom felt a need to stand on his dignity, save when some fool denied it. And the last thing he wanted just then was to be given glory in the presence of all. There were those who believed him dead and for other sakes than his own must not cease believing it.

He sat amid splendour. The rushes under his feet were new, and covered neat flagstones instead of trodden earth. Three mighty wrought-iron chandeliers hung by chains from beams as mighty. Branched candlesticks instead of smoky flaring torches were bracketed to walls hung with gold-broidered tapestries. A stone-lined trench for fire, with long hearths each side of it, ran between a double row of carved pillars. At long tables King Cerdic's henchmen ate, drank and swapped stories, and every now and then fought without rancour. Not often was there much damage aside from a broken bone or two. Weapons were left outside by command.

The three people that interested the bard most were in the places of most honour. King Cerdic was one, a broad strong man with tawny hair, great tufted eyebrows and a beard that covered most of his powerful chest. His drinking cup was made from a skull painted scarlet, rimmed and lined with beaten gold, teeth of gold in its jaws, gems of amber in its empty sockets. The man seemed to have a prediliction for skulls.

There was a story about the monstrous one through whose mouth one entered the hall. When the time came for Felimid to do so, he'd been told. Smiling, the warrior who had received him said that it was a test and a safeguard. The honest had no cause to be afraid, but when a quest came with treachery in his heart, the naked jaws clashed shut as he stepped between them, and bit him in half. Felimid had not been afraid, but he'd been glad he meant Cerdic no harm. He knew that dead bones in themselves had no power; but it was possible that some demon or animating spirit had been conjured into the skull's emptiness, to deal death when it sensed guilty fear.

He'd passed the test, whatever.

Second of the three was Cynric, the atheling or King's heir, who sat at Cerdic's right, his father's younger image but that he went more flamboyantly clad and his beard was barbered close. Last was his wife Vivayn, the daughter of that Natanleod his father had killed at Charford four years gone. She was beautiful. Felimid's eyes assured him of that, even at a smoky, firelit distance.

A woman came by with a pot of steaming sausage. She handled it easily, heavy though it was. There were plenty of men eager to help themselves to the contents, and the bearer too. She evaded some of their slaps

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and grabs and fended off others in spite of her clumsy burden. The bard forebore to add to her difficulties, though he was tempted. She was flushed and sweating, with a strong full body, and she knew all its uses by the way she handled it. When a man groped her too boldly she cracked his nose with her ladle, her braided yellow hair swinging. Others laughed approval and seized him when he would have lunged at her again.

She moved on, throwing a big savoury morsel before the bard as if she'd sooner have knifed him. Quite seriously he held up his hands, palm outward, and placed them flat on the board.

'I'm aware it's the sausage you are giving out to one and all,' he said.

He smiled. Femilid's smile could harm a brigand intent on murder.

'I'll bide until you're a little drunk before I praise you,' she answered.

'It might be best. And if I'm fortunate it will be you that brings me the brew to get drunk on. I'm Felimid of Erin. What is your name?'

'Eldrid.' Her mouth was full and warm as her body. There was a tiny puckered scar where the skin stretched over her cheekbone. Her narrow eyes were greygreen with tawny flecks in them and each iris had a thin tawny edge.

No kitchen girl she. Her garb was too fine and she was too fearless. She was probably one of the women who attended Vivayn. There were others in the hall, but they would all go to her bower before long. The sea-wolves were not to be trusted in drink.

Felimid gazed at the king in his high seat. Cerdic was an acknowledged son of King Oisc of Kent, and therefore a grandson of great Hengist. The bard had fallen out grievously with Oisc some time before. There was risk in entering Cerdic's dun, but Felimid wanted a quick road across the sea and this was the nearest place to find one. April was beginning. Cerdic would soon be off raiding distant shores, and Felimid might go with him if he won favour. He must rely on his harp and his tongue for that.

A short figure came stumping by on crutches. The bard whistled silently to see him. But four feet high, he was almost a yard wide, with thick heavy bones and limbs. His swart head was bald, but harsh dense hair made a thicket of his face. He wore a leather tunic and a belt of linked iron plaques. His beard had covered the belt in a bigger, more splendid fan than the king's, if working with fire had not kept it always burned nearer his chin. The hair was scorched from his brawny hands and forearms as well. They were seared and calloused by the trade of the smith. Another? Of recent days three smiths had omened badly for Felimid, but with the third the sequence had been broken. The number four had nothing mystical about it.

Some warrior thrust out a leg and sent the short man tumbling. One crutch flew clattering away. A foot pressed on the cripple's squat chest and a derisive grin loomed above him.

'Ho, little iron-hammerer!' guffawed the man. 'Confess the truth that your breed sprang from the maggots in a giant's rotting flesh, and I'll let you crawl off!"

The cripple snarled. His thick-fingered hands moved. One shut bone-hurtingly on his tormentor's toes, the other on his heel. With a deliberate wrench he turned the foot completely around on its ankle. The

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warrior spun with it and fell against the table after two clumsy hops. He gripped it, shuddering and sweating.

'My foot!' he raved. 'This maggot's grandson has broke my foot! Grab him, you there! Teach him some respect!'

A couple did, and at once found themselves wanting help. The smith was solid and durable as stone. Four it took to hold him down, while the first man watched with his face twisted by fury and pain.

'The hearth-with him!' he snarled. 'Hold his head over the fire until his chestnut of a brain roasts!'

The four thought that these were merry instructions and began to carry them out. Now Felimid had been raised to honour smiths and poets and all makers. To burn one's head did not seem right to him.

He'd no weapon but his eating knife. His ancestor's sword hung in a shut chamber with other men's spears. He'd have to begin swiftly and finish even swifter.

He moved. He went over the table like a hunting marten. The two heroes who held the cripple's legs he shamelessly took from behind. He clouted their heads together with all his strength, and it wasn't his fault that they rebounded instead of changing places. Down went the pair of them, done for the night. Another had begun to rise when Felimid kicked him enthusiastically in the middle. He'd aimed the kick lower, but misjudged. The man went backwards into the fire-trench and rose out of it blazing. Some of the feasters threw mead over him, but they largely missed because they were laughing so hard. Since he was beginning to burn briskly, and might have fired the hall itself the way he was dancing about, two hefty fellows ran him down to the table's end where a big cask of barley beer had been opened, and quenched him by shoving him in head-first. Then they debated over his kicking shoes whether to leave him in for flavour. At least they decided they had better drag him out before he drank it all.

The fourth had snatched a short iron spit from the hearth and tried to brain Felimid with it. He'd have done better to stab at throat or belly, for then he might have had a second chance, or perhaps not have wanted one. His full-arm swing gave the bard time to dodge. Somehow Felimid wasn't there. His long-fingered hands seized the man's head and jerked it down to meet a rising knee. All the mercy before unconsciousness for the Jute was that he didn't bite through his tongue. It could have been mortal if he had.

The man who had begun it all was truly out of the fight. The cripple had dragged him down, choked him senseless, and was now hitting him about the head and shoulders with his crutch as though trying to drive in nails. Felimid heaved him into the air, with a grunt of surprise at his stony heaviness, and dropped him on a bench in time to save tearing his guts with effort. Then he found the other crutch, returned it to the cripple and poured him a horn of mead. As has been written, he was not the man to stand on his aristocratic dignity if no fool put an affront on him.

'I'm thinking,' said the bard, 'that you must be of the race the Jutes do call dwarves.'

'I am a dwarf,' said the cripple.

'And have you a name? Mine is Felimid.'

'I am Glinthi.'

'The king's smith, I do not doubt? Maker of battle-gear and all this rare

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beauty of wrought iron around us? I was observing it.'

Glinthi nodded.

'Cairbre and Ogma! Has some god restricted you to a dole of seven words in a day and a night? I'm not asking assonance and rhyme of you, nor cadence and alliteration neither, but—'.

There was a steward of the king's by his side. 'Scop? My master the king will talk with you.'

Felimid caught up the harp Golden Singer. 'I hasten.'

King Cerdic smiled through his flowing beard, but his fingers gloatingly rubbed the grim cup he held, even when he was not thinking of it. 'I saw you fight, stranger. A brisk enough little altercation, and well handled. It's good that you saved Glinthi. He's a thrall I value, though a dour little scut. He ran away, do you know? When he was brought back I made myself secure that he wouldn't run again. Haw haw! I'll wager you got no thanks from him.'

'He's not what any would call talkative, my lord.'

'What brings you to Westri?'

Felimid repeated the fulsome words he'd used before. Cerdic ran fingers through his voluminous beard and chuckled. His eyes were like Eldrid's, or rather Eldrid's were like the king's. It was not difficult to guess why. Cynric the atheling's were the same, grey-green as the sea, tawnily flecked and rimmed under tawny tufted brows. When he stood to give a health he showed Felimid's height, but he was broader-bodied and thicker-limbed, though for all that he moved with lithe ease. He was like a big golden lynx.

His wife Vivayn made the bard uneasy. A mass of curling hair the colour of bronze, held back from her fine oval face by a fillet of gold, fell down to her very feet so that she needed no mantle. Her grey eyes were disconcertingly clear, but even in a song he'd have found other words than *candid* to flatter them. Her lips were a darker red than Eldrid's but not so full, and they curved upward ever so slightly at the corners as if she were always about to smile at some secret she had. The secret, Felimid thought, would be a cruel joke on someone. Some of the unease he felt was caused by that unchanging never-quite-smile, and some of it by her hair and eyes. They reminded him of Cein. Red jewel, he had called her, and she was dead.

Vivayn wore a russet gown, and over it a soft blue tunic of unborn lamb's wool. It was made simply of two oblong pieces, one before and one behind, fastened on her shoulders by golden brooches and at the waist by a rich girdle. Plainly she enjoyed wearing such garments, and perhaps she enjoyed her marriage to Cynric too. He was handsome and he'd be a king one day. She did not look like one to challenge events if her condition was not worsened by them.

The bard would have wanted a better reason to cross her than the fun of the thing.

II

Three smiles that are worse than grief; the smile of the Sun before rain, the smile of a leaping dog, and the smile of your wife to you after sleeping with another man.

—Irish Triad

A TRAVELLING BARD must have a fox's ear for gossip, the understanding to know truth from lies, and a fine judgment in deciding which to repeat. All these things Felimid had. He had

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besides a memory that amazed even him at times. Thus he was able to entertain Cerdic of Westri without giving offence by some slip of the tongue.

He recited the man's descent from Wotan, Victory-Bringer, God of Ravens, through Hengist and Oisc, extolling the kingly and warlike virtues of each, though not so loudly that he couldn't praise Cerdic more. He made a virtue of the hero's obscure birth by giving him a captured British princess for a mother and having him reared in hiding because of cruel enemies. With all his remarkable memory, he couldn't offhand think of a hero who hadn't spent his youth in that way.

As Cerdic grew to be a warrior, then a chieftain and father, his saga gathered power. The harp rang and sobbed under the roof-beams. The bard told how Cerdic fared west from Kent with his wife and boy to take Vectis with five ships. He told of voyaging and looting through the years since, at first without Cynric but later with him. He described unrestrainedly the invasion of the mainland, the taking of Hamo's Port and the later battle at Charford where Natanleod was slain by Cerdic's hand, and one thousand of his men with him.

'Five!' shouted Cerdic, and the bard so amended it.

Then he sang of softer matters, of the love that grew between daughter of the vanquished and son of the victor. Cynric looked irritated and uncomfortable, but couldn't truly object. The bard grinned like a cat inside himself, and from the way her gaze rested on him Vivayn knew it. He told of Cerdic's oath to build the most splendid hall in the northern lands for them to wed in, which was a fabrication of the moment but became the truth for his hearers.

Last he described Cerdic's battle with the sea-dragon, to gain shingles for his roof and a frame for his hall-door. Three war-boats went out to the hunting, and two were smashed by the monster's tail, their brave men all drowned. Cerdic himself broke two harpoons on unyielding scales, and as the awful head drooled over him from parted jaws, he seized his last spear and sprang into the monster's mouth. He jammed it upright in the stinking cave, and when the jaws bit down the spear was driven through the ridgy palate hard into the brain. When the dragon shrieked its death-cry Cerdic writhed half dead from between its teeth to drop into the clean sea, from which his gesithae[1] picked him. Yet he recovered to the wonder of all, and saw his princely son wed in the manner of his vow.

That too became incontestable truth for all the future.

The king put a coiled gold ring on his arm.

Then it was time for the women to leave the hall, before the men became drunken and rowdy. The bard caught Eldrid's eye as she went, and she closed it slowly. Her mouth curved into a smile worth ten of Vivayn's cryptic hints at one.

Felimid left as soon as he could without giving offence, and poured away most of the strong royal brew given him in the meantime. Swilling and swiving went ill together, and if that wasn't what Eldrid wanted then she was guilty of pretence. Scabbarded sword in hand, he went back to the barn where he'd stabled the dun gelding.

Eldrid was there, cloaked in wolfskin. She put a palm across his mouth before he could utter a word,

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then took it away and applied her own mouth in its place. She was in no haste and enjoyed what she did. That was true of Felimid, too. There were slithering noises in the hay, low gasps and a breathy laugh, and then a happy rhythm that quickened and slowed by turns. Last of all Eldrid shuddered strongly, stretched luxuriously and yawned as if waking with the dawn on a summer's day.

'Umm,' said she. She could fuck for a reason if she must, as to avoid a beating or earn a present, but she liked it for its own sake in spite of that. And she liked this man better than most.

They lay side by side and she held him. 'You are the king's daughter, not so?' he asked. 'Your eyes are like his and the atheling's.'

'Mine and many others', not to speak of those of my sibs with blue eyes or brown. Royal bastards are always many, but Cerdic's are beyond counting.'

'Aye. I'm a bastard myself, and not even royal. But we have another thing in common if the stories are true. We both descend from gods, you from the Victory-Bringer and I from Ogma through Cairbre.'

Eldrid thought to herself that such stories were cheap, but she did not declare it. She said, 'It's not for that I came. It's for what you did. Had you fought for me, I'd have valued it at less; I'd have known what you wanted. But Glinthi? Only a man of true generosity would have aided that little wart.' She added, 'And I liked the look of you.'

'The liking was on two sides, then,' answered Felimid, finding work for idle hands. 'And the touch, and the taste and the scent and the sound of you.'

Her fingers discovered employ of their own.

'You are one of the Lady Vivayn's women, by your garb,' said the bard sleepily, when the time for talk had come around again.

'True,' said Eldrid against his throat, 'but barn is better than bower tonight.'

'That's not what I was thinking. Will she not take a distaff to your back?'

'If she does it will be worth it. But I think not. She's not strict in that way.' She bit him and chuckled softly. 'That's for asking after instead of before.'

He smacked her bum on its fullest curve. 'Even generosity has its bounds.'

In the morning she interestedly watched him shave. 'I don't know why you do that,' she said. 'Why scrape off your beard when it's so much trouble? None of the men here do.'

'I'm not a Jute, and there are other customs.' He finished the task and dried his face on his cloak. Looking towards the narrow gate of the dun, he turned rigid with sudden astonishment. 'Cairbre and Ogma!' He relaxed into more deadly alertness. 'Now there's a fellow who once said much the same to me, but he wasn't so polite. I'm glad I saw him first.' He loosened Cat in his sheath. 'I think there will be trouble now.'

'With that one?' Eldrid had gone pale. 'I know him.'

'And he knows me, without love.'

'Then you had better run for your life!'

'No.' The ships to take him out of Britain were here, and he'd been chased from too many places of late. He approached the huge man without haste or dawdling. The sea-dragon's skull seemed to laugh at them both.

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'Tosti!'

The giant turned with a baring of teeth. He was full half a foot taller than Felimid, who was himself above middle height. He was gaunt but powerful, with pale eyes and pale hair. Three fingers were gone from his right hand, and his bearded face was hideously scarred. Even the other Jutes feared him for his savagery. He wore a white wolfskin with the scalp resting on his head like a cap and the forelegs hanging down his chest. He wore it always, and some said there were times when he wore it as a beast. But nobody said that to him.

The bard inquired, 'Does your shoulder still pain you?'

'Oh, this is luck,' said Tosti beatifically. 'Oh, but it gives me joy to see you here. I cannot tell you how much I was hoping that nobody else had killed you.'

'I'm a guest of King Cerdic,' Felimid warned.

'You won't hide behind that for long when I've spoken with him.'

He's taking this too calmly. I'd have expected him to spring upon me with a bellow of rage and finish the matter at once. Why has he not? It's as if he knew he'd find me here. As if he'd been savouring this all the way from Kent and wants to relish it a while longer.

Aye, and how did he come so far? He wasn't in hall or dun last night. He's but now arrived, out of a wilderness alone. Can it be true what they say of him?

Felimid's next remark did not seem to follow either from his spoken words or his thoughts, but by the way Tosti started and the way his pale eyes glittered, he did not find it empty of meaning.

'Your clothing does not fit you,' Felimid observed.

'I myself will cut the blood-eagle on your back!'

But he appeared content to wait until Cerdic had listened to his case and sanctioned such awful mutilation, which again made the bard wonder. Tosti was not known for his patience with forms of law. Perhaps he was so sure of himself that he could even endure waiting.

Cerdic heard both sides of the argument once he had broken fast.

'This snivelling scut came among us in Kent for the Yule feast, as he's come sneaking here!' Tosti said. 'Oh, he's all flattery and smooth words, lord. I've heard him. He can charm the heart out of a woman's breast or a man's, for all that he's neither himself—the right stuff for a spy! And a spy he was! My master's wizard accused him for one, having learned it by divination and spirits' advice. We hung him by the heels above a wolf pit, but he escaped and fled into the Forest of Andred, and stole a kitchen girl to take with him. We hunted him there, but he led us into a trap in which many of us were killed, and my master your kingly father was almost among them. I'd thought the harper dead until now.'

'Indeed,' murmured Cerdic like distant thunder's first rumble. 'Felimid?'

'He's told about half the truth, my lord, and more than misled you,' the bard said boldly. 'His talk of "we" this and "we" that is nonsense. I was hunted into the forest by men and dogs, but this reeking berserk was not among them. He was abed with a wound *I* had given him in a fight his insults had started! And if he denies it I'll kill him.'

Tosti roared and sprang, and it took nine men to hold him until his fit's passing weakened him.

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'I'd heard of that,' Cerdic admitted. 'News travels even in winter, but I'd not have conceived you could be the man, even after last night. You are so much smaller than he.'

'My lord, so are you. It hasn't kept you from winning fame.'

'He beat me by trickery!' Tosti raved. 'Give me a sword, let me face him again! I will kill him! I will kill, kill!'

'He speaks of trickery! My lord, it was he who had King Oisc's wizard accuse me, after he'd lost an honest fight. I'd even let him live! Whether with bribery or threats, he put lies in the mouth of a drumming, dancing fraud—'

'No fraud is that one,' Tosti growled. 'Who told me where to find you, do you suppose? I do not love him, and I did not have him accuse you! But his powers are real.'

'Fraud or no, he lied about me, and what other reason could he have had? As for the kitchen girl, she helped me escape and dared not then remain behind, nor could I decently leave her. I'll compensate King Oisc for her loss and gladly, if you, my lord Cerdic, will take me raiding with you to raise the necessary.' Felimid touched his golden arm-ring. 'I have this, but it's a royal gift I'll not lose unless my arm goes with it.'

'Then it were best that you fight,' Cerdic said thoughtfully. 'There is nothing else to do but send to Kent for witnesses, and we'd likely waste much time to get no nearer the truth. You, Felimid, are you willing to the battle?'

'Willing and ready, my lord!' His heart was unpleasantly hollow and sinking like a holed ship, but he put on a cheerful face. He'd fought Tosti once, and beaten him once, but partly because Tosti had despised him as an opponent. The Jute knew now how quick he was. He would not underestimate Felimid again, and he was a terrible foe. He'd have to be killed or the bard would have to die.

'Aye, willing and ready,' he repeated. 'And if I should lose, will you honour me by sending this gold ring by Tosti's hand to your father, for his kitchen girl? And if I should win, will you honour me by granting what I have asked? A place in your ship?'

'Freely!' The king looked at Tosti with a certain distaste. 'I think you were mistaken when you said this one is neither man nor woman.'

'Lord,' said Tosti hoarsely, as though the word strangled him, 'he's your father's enemy, and a spy! You cannot give him right of battle!'

'*Cannot*?' queried Cerdic. 'Are you saying that you do not wish to fight him?'

Tosti looked agonized. His whole hand and his marred one lifted, clawed shreds from the air. In torment he said, 'No.'

It's too feeble to say that Felimid could not accept it. He was astounded, though he felt a sneaking relief. Tosti refusing combat? Stone melting! Ice burning! The wolf resting by the young kid!

Cerdic would have had any other man who said that scourged out of his dun. With Tosti he dared not even comment: the giant had killed eight men in outbursts of rage over littler things.

'Then this ends it,' the king said. 'There will be no fight, and Felimid remains my guest. As will you if you wish.'

Tosti nodded bleakly.

'I'd as soon fight now, my lord,' put in Felimid. He had to make himself say it. Tosti was one of the few men who frightened him, but since he was

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here and had to be reckoned with, best their quarrel end the sworder's way.

Tosti said again, 'No.'

Cerdic slapped the table with the flat of his blond-haired hand. The board reverberated end to end, and it was not of shoddy crafting. 'Then enough!'

The bard understood. Cerdic hated himself for knuckling under to Tosti from fear, and did not like a stranger to show more courage. Push him further and he might take Tosti's side outright. The bard's brew of luck had here turned rancid all in an hour.

A king's whim . . .

It was awkward, but not so much that it marred the day. He spent much of it with Cynric the atheling; they hunted in the forest and looked over the long war-boats as they were fitted and provisioned. That night Felimid sat at the king's table and enjoyed his meat and drink as much as any man. He sang this time of Sigifrid Fafnir's-bane and the breaking of the Burgundian kingdom by the Huns. Since Tosti sat staring before him with ice-pale eyes, drinking steadily without apparent joy or effect, the dullest man there contrasted the two and preferred the bard, even if he was a stranger not of their race.

Felimid sensed his popularity. He traded upon it to give them a hero-tale of his own people, of his ancestor Ogma, the battle-champion of the Tuatha De Danann. He'd lived in days when iron was a new thing in the west, and the incoming tribes that used it were pressing the Earth-Mother's children hard. Of them all only Ogma bore an iron weapon, forged from the metal of a fallen star. It was stolen from him by magic and treachery the night before he was to fight with a leader of the tribe of Nemedh. He'd given his oath by the Mother to do battle, and bound by it he went to fight with bronze against an iron weapon. And he died. For the Tuatha De Danann that was the beginning of their end.

It was well received. As invaders themselves, the Jutes relished a tale in which the invaders won. The slayer of Ogma was a strong man who did not learn the truth of his victory until the treacher came whining to him for reward, and then killed him with one blow, so the Jutes could approve of him and sorrow virtuously for Ogma. *As long as he's dead,* Felimid thought sourly.

The sudden resolution in Tosti's cold eyes was not noticed in the hubbub.

When Felimid sought the barn, a woman's indupitable form moved out of the shadows where she had waited for him. The slanting moonlight showed Eldrid's braided hair and generously curved body, Edlrid's smile. But somehow as he looked she seemed to waver in his sight like an image in a rippled pool. He hadn't drunk that much. Indeed he'd drunk little, as a man should who has an enemy about who may be his master. He bent upon her the bardic sight that pierces glamour and illusory seeming. The moonlight shimmered about her.

'Ah, Felimid, lover,' she greeted him.

Her appearance melted and ran like wrought gold in a cauldron. Her body was more slender, though not a whit less desirable. Her hair darkened, lengthened, fell in a tumbling cataract to her ankles. Her dark-red lips had a mocking upward curve at the corners and her eyes were large and grey. Her garb was a clasped and belted tunic over a rich gown.

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'Vivayn!'

She took a pace back. Then she laughed softly. 'Then magic does not blind you! You are a true bard of the ancient sort. Well, but how was I to know? There are so few left in these miserable times.'

'Where is Eldrid?'

'In my bower, in my bed. She wears my semblance as I wear hers. The illusion will pass at dawn, and she will be none the worse. I have given her a sleeping draught, Felimid; she knows nothing and will remember nothing.'

'Cairbre and Ogma! What if Cynric bursts in upon her, roaring drunk and randy? She's his half-sister, curse you!' He finished somewhat weakly, 'That's beyond a joke.'

'What beautiful concern!' she purred. 'I like it. Eldrid would too, my brave nightingale, but you need not fear for her virtue. Cynric will not seek me tonight, or any woman he believes is me. I whispered a word in his ear to make sure of that. If he wants a woman he will take some other.'

She raised graceful arms and intertwined her fingers behind his neck. Her eternal hint at a smile became a full one. She was scented with amber and civet from far places and her own female pungency. He wasn't new to the game she was proposing, but he felt hollow and heady as when his first girl had led him by the hand between plaited straw hives where red bees clustered humming, and smiled the same way. Vivayn could have made any man feel cloddish with a canted brow and a word.

'I'd not dishonour Cynric,' he said, thinking how feeble that was.

'Cynric?' She sneered the name. 'Let me tell you how much he cares for me! You have seen the skull the king drinks from?'

'I have.'

'My father',' she said simply.

'Gods!' Felimid breathed. 'Now that's untactful.' He searched her eyes. 'And is this then just in the way of vengeance?'

She laughed like chiming bronze. 'Such petty sneaking retribution? I, a king's daughter and a witch? No, Felimid of Erin! If I wanted vengeance I'd have taken it on father and son with agaonizing poison by this! But I'd have wed a king's son in any event, if the sea-wolves had not invaded, and been offered as little choice in the matter—so what odds? Cynric is handsome and young and brave and all the rest of it, and happily more stupid than you. I don't mind him. But you will see why I feel no particular loyalty to him either.' Her touch worked subtle witchcraft at the base of his neck all the while. 'So comfort your pride. This is not for spite. I'm here simply because I wish to be.'

No answer he made. He'd uttered enough pomposities for a year. Tosti might carve him tomorrow, and if that befell he did not wish to spend his last mortal moments with the thought that a king's beautiful daughter had offered herself and had him deny her.

He kissed her warmly from brow to chin, lingering at the soft well of deliciousness that was her mouth. Brooches and buckles opened though no fingers had touched them; the bits of her over-tunic slipped rustling into the hay. But she left her gown to him, difficult as it was to take off past the mass of her hair. A prize to be valued should be struggled for.

III

The lady stood at her bower door,
As straight as willow wand;

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The blacksmith stood a little forbye,
Wi' hammer in his hand.
—Old Ballad

If Vivayn was selfish in all other ways, she did not make a selfish lover. She gave delight and delighted in giving, but she remained awake and thoughtful after the bard was asleep, and her meditations were not of the softer sort.

She hadn't intended him to know whose long thighs parted for him. She had put on Eldrid's appearance to hide her own for that reason. Well, but he knew now. She did not await betrayal from him. She was a judge of men; she found it needful to be. None the less it caused her inquietude that he knew.

Well, Tosti might slay him.

She did not shudder at herself for considering it. She would be sorry if it happened, but not in any deep or lasting way, and there would be a certain relief. A danger to her would be gone. The Jutes had cruel ways with unfaithful wives; but curiously it did not enter her mind to ensure the bard's death with drugs or magic. Not that it was beyond her. It was only that with this man she saw no need. He was sensible: she could reach an accommodation with him. If he survived.

She felt among the hay for the fastenings of her tunic. Worn without the gown it was indecent, but to any eyes but Felimid's it would be a simple shift, and she was but crossing the yard to the jakes. She put on her shoes and felt the man stir. She whispered an explanation and left him.

She had hardly set foot outside the barn when she was roughly seized and gagged by a hardened palm. A gigantic form faced her. The moon silvered his pale beard and the white wolfskin over his shoulders, but could not soften his terrible scars. The skin apart, he was naked. His feet were bare. He held a coldly gleaming axe.

A smaller man was with him, and the unseen carl who held her counted two. The slayer had found allies, then. In Cerdic's own dun! Vivayn looked at Tosti and tasted fear like tarnished copper.

'Now let us see what this bard is made of,' Tosti said.

They went into the barn. Even asleep Felimid heard them coming. He faced them with drawn weapon before they came near him. Tosti grinned appallingly.

'We have your bedmate, bard. Shall we dicker? I know from Kent that you are soft for your women. You didn't leave that other slut behind.'

'And what is it you want?'

'Give up your sword.'

Felimid was bound to laugh. 'That you may butcher me? And then her? Come take it!'

'I'll butcher you tomorrow, scut! For tonight your sword will do. In the morning we will fight. Come to the holm[2] with common metal, like your ancestor. Die like him!'

Comprehension came. 'So that's the way of it? It's not myself you fear at all! It's Cat. And I gave you the notion, did I not? But why fear him so much?'

The shining weapon hummed in Felimid's hand. He recalled his other fight with Tosti, when the slayer had rushed upon him wild with rage, and how he'd looked so strangely at the weapon once his first mad fury was over. He'd taken one slight wound himself, and Felimid had been untouched.

'That sword is too good for you,' he'd said. 'When I kill you it will be mine.'

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But had he coveted Cat to fight with, or to prevent any from again lifting Cat against him? Silver hilt, silver pommel, silver inscriptions along the blade—

'You *are* a shapeshifter,' Felimid said.

Tosti's companions did not look happy.

Tosti replied in a feral snarl. 'The sword or your bitch's throat cut!'

'Hold!' the bard said urgently. 'Let's talk some more! Say that I surrender Cat. Say further that I'm not then cut down where I stand. What of, hum, Eldrid?'

'These two will take her and the sword into the forest, and keep them there till I have finished with you. She will live until our fight is over, in any case. If you lose, as you will, you will be past caring—but at least you may hope that if you win you may do something for her. It's better than seeing her die now.'

He didn't know that she was Vivayn. But the two carls would know, when the illusion ended at dawn, and if they had the wit to cobble together a yarn that masked their guilt with hers, why she was done. And Eldrid with her. They would go to the crabs side by side.

Vivayn was thinking the same. The threatening kiss of the dagger's edge across her tender throat was enough to loosen her bowels. And yet it was better than the death men gave an adulteress.

Behind and beneath the terror she thought, *I've played dangerously; I've no right to whimper. But I've surely right and reason to be afraid. And I am! Felimid! Don't let them—*

A voice like an angry sea roared, 'Bastards! Turn about and die!'

The squat crippled shape was grotesque in the moonlight slanting through the barn door. Her captor's consternation let Vivayn tear free and run. Spears lifted. Glinthi dropped a crutch, leaned on the other and swung a short massive sledge like some stunted Thor. It shattered a carl's knee, and after he fell down it caved in his chest. The other showed great cowardice or presence of mind and legged it. Racing towards the hall, he shouted accusations of all kinds and yammered for the king, the king! The bard had gone mad! He was trying to murder Tosti to stop his mouth! Nor did any bar his way to demand that he make sense, for the king's great hall had but one guard.

The carl remembered it too late.

'Who enters here with treachery in his heard—'

The dragon's skeletal jaws clashed.

Tosti hefted his axe, faced Felimid with it. He chopped and cut, catching blows on the axehead, but the dun was coming awake in a great commotion and he knew he'd failed. The sword was a dazzle of white fire before his eyes. With an insane yell he flung the axe at Felimid's head and ran from the barn. Felimid bent aside from the waist and struck the flying axe away with Ogma's sword.

'Vivayn!' he called.

She came to him running, and said low, 'Not that name!'

But Glinthi had heard, and hearing he knew what the name signified. There was hardly a secret from him in the whole of King Cerdic's dun. His legs were crippled, not his eyes or ears. Neither was his tongue crippled, but he was not given to wagging it. He cleaned his heavy hammer with straw and pretended the name had escaped him.

'Ha!' he grunted. 'two of those we fought last night. None of the others can walk yet. Yon big madman found

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'em ready tools for his use.'

'Then we'll weep no tears for them,' Felimid said. 'How did you come here at such an opportune time, Glinthi?'

'I knew,' the dwarf said simply. 'I heard 'em plotting. I came.' He shrugged. 'Better than cadence and alliteration, ha?'

For a moment the bard did not know what he meant, and then he remembered. 'Much better' he agreed. 'Now we had best make our explanations to the king.'

The dragon skull's destroying the carl was all the proof Cerdic wanted. His gesithae searched the dun for Tosti, but he was nowhere to be found. He had gone as he'd come.

'I had his sleeping place watched by good men!' raged Cerdic. 'They were to prevent such a thing as this! How did he slip by them?'

'He's a manwolf, my lord,' Felimid answered. 'I've heard it said of him, and now I know it is true. He came from Kent alone, travelling and hunting by night in his beast-shape, resting by day. But then he could carry no garments with him but his beast-skin. He took them from some unfortunate yoeman within your borders, no doubt, but could not get them large enough. I remarked when he first came here that they did not fit him, and he was ill pleased. Eldrid here heard me say it and can so witness.'

'It's true, my lord,' said his companion, taking the hint. It was eerie, when he saw her so plainly as Vivayn, to know that all others saw her as Eldrid. 'And he was naked but for his wolfskin when he came to the barn! He must have dodged by your watchers in beast-shape, as well.'

'Yet none have *seen* him as a wolf,' growled Cerdic, pondering.

'No, my lord,' Felimid owned. 'But though he hates me much and fears me not, he would not fight me. I think it's the sword Cat he fears, that he came to take from me. As all may see, he's hilted and inlaid with silver, by which alone a manwolf can die. He faced me with axe tonight, and ran when the alarm was raised. When was Tosti ever known to run? Were Cat simple iron, Tosti had stayed to kill or die though all the world congregated to watch. But the presence of silver panicked him. So do I suppose.'

Cerdic was no fool. 'Yet he fought you as a man.' He quoted from gnomic law, '*When the wolf is in the skin, by silver alone can his death come. When the wolf is out of the skin, then can iron, stone or hemp be his bane.*'

'As belief has it, my lord,' Felimid agreed. 'It may be untrue, or it may be that Tosti fears silver beyond thought or reason in either shape. It's only he can tell us now.'

'Aye, aye. He may return. I think it best we walk the palisade with torches until dawn. Glinthi! Go fangle at once all weapons that you can from silver. I'll have what store the dun holds brought to you in your smithy. Command what help you wish.'

'Aye, m'lord.'

Then came a group of women from the bower, led night-robed and mantled by what seemed another Vivayn. Felimid's bardic sight pared the false appearance from her and showed him Eldrid. To everyone else she *was* Vivayn: it was confusing.

'Are we attacked, my lord?' she asked of Cynric. 'May we be needed?'

The atheling told her no and sent her back. Even he was fooled. He ordered whom he thought was Eldrid to go with her. Before she went, Felimid whispered in her ear:

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'Are all your potions ineffective as your sleeping draughts?'

Vivayn chuckled. 'Eldrid's my friend and confidante in all things. Her name means 'wise friend', did you know? But why should I have told you? Nor you may not complain we made a fool of you. God did that.' She laughed again. 'Good night.'

And Vivayn was corrupted from the Latin, and meant lively. Felimid mounted Cerdic's ramparts in something of a daze. It was well that Tosti did not return, for the bard was so lost in thought that his vigilance lapsed now and then. He'd have been easy prey.

Vivayn and Eldrid. Eldrid and Vivayn. King's daughters both. How many lovers had they shared? How often had they changed appearances as they were changing clothes? And he the first to know of it! Cairbre and Ogma! Dangerous knowledge, that. Vivayn had made such casual mention of agonizing poison.

If Cynric learned, he'd die an even fouler death.

And then there was the dwarf. He wasn't loose of tongue, but by the great and mighty gods he'd given proof that little in this place went undiscovered by him. If he knew, and something in his voice and manner made the bard suspect he did, there was another danger. He hated Cerdic for the best of reasons. He owed Felimid nothing, by his lights: he'd paid his debt. The dwarves were surly, grasping, by repute, but did pay their debts; scrupulously for good and unrelentingly for ill. Might he not wish Felimid's help in gaining vengeance, and threaten him or Vivayn or both of them? And what might not Vivayn do, in that event?

A week or more for hell to brew before the ships could sail . . .

And knowing that he'd had Vivayn and lied to Cerdic, Felimid didn't care to step again betweent he dragon's judging jaws.

When dawn appeared and watch was ended, he sought the king.

'My lord,' he said. 'Since Tosti has not come to me, I am determined to go to him and fight our battle. He's waiting for me somewhere. Twice now by treachery he's tried to murder me or have me slain. I make my oath I will not sail nor raid with you till he or I lies dead!'

Cerdic looked respectful, which was praise indeed. After the bard had broken fast, he got upon the dun and rode away from there. By cursed luck that way out of Britain was closed to him, and riding west would take him back to other parts where he was not forgotten. North he could not go, but never had he been to London, and ships still came there from across the Narrow Sea, he'd heard.

Hmm—London was far, and Tosti waited somewhere. Felimid's dearest wish was not to see him ever again. He'd have to chance it, that was all. At least the manwolf was a single enemy, not four or five, and his intentions weren't in doubt. Only a fool wept tears for what he couldn't change.

Vivayn and Eldrid.

Towards the risen Sun Felimid cantered.

Laughing.

1. gesithae: a king's hearth-companions, chosen friends, bound to avenge him if he was slain and entitled to be avenged by him if they were.

2. holm: an island in a river, where single combat was customarily fought. Such a duel was known as holmgang.

—DENNIS MORE

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OCEAN

The borderline between science fiction and fantasy is not easily defined, as the following story demonstrates . . .

STEVE UTLEY

THE *Sumerian netherworld was a gloomy place,* the ocean told her. *The spirits of the dead had only dust and clay to eat.*

She had flippers and gills now. She swam in lazy circles, careful not to let her transformed hands and feet brush the spines of the malevolent sea urchins on the bottom. She half-listened to what the ocean was telling her, and her thoughts formed a wake behind her as she swam:

Why do I persist?

Why do I try to hold out against that dark skulker, that imaginary other?

Why do I argue with him? Why do I argue with myself?

Meditation made her careless. She touched bottom with one of her flippers, and the urchins there irised open their round mouths to laugh as their poisonous spines broke off in her. Theirs was a fast-acting, extremely potent toxin, but they pumped so much of it into her in that single split-second of inattention that its effect far outstripped her capacity to be affected. The memories unleashed by this flood of venom were therefore vivid but fragmented or else complete but badly faded. She did not suffer as much as she might have. But suffering is relative. She started to founder, then raised her flippers above the surface, flattened and broadened them into wings and rose clumsily, back into the black sky, back into the wires of her true body.

Behind her, the ocean ceased to murmur of the Sumerian netherworld.

HE WAS inspecting her again, prowling through the semi-dead parts of her body, going *mmm* with characteristic interest whenever he came upon some fresh sign of deterioration. He took pride in his work. And he was coming her way, toward the light, toward the live end of her. He was coming to torment her again.

She felt a shadow walking through her body as she emerged from her urchin-infested refuge. Her eyes and ears no longer functioned down in the black part of herself, but she sensed that he had returned. She knew when he glided his dark hand over the bulkheads, micro-millimeters separating the tips of his fingers, if fingers they were, from the hard, cold surfaces. Behind her walls, under her decks, a few circuits remained unbroken, and those enabled her to sense him when he came. And *there!* he had pressed his hand against the bulkhead and knew that she was thinking about

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him.

He could put his hand through the panels and clutch at her thoughts, charged particles running through loops of wire, dead-ending in panic at long-ago burnt-out sensors.

Sometimes, he only eavesdropped long enough to assure himself that she was aware of his presence, that she did not cherish his company, and then he would go away, laughing softly.

Sometimes, he closed his hand, and some of the life still flickering there, hidden within the walls of her semi-dead parts, simply ceased. Thus had he whittled her away.

He was coming again to the major part of her that remained alive and in the light. He loved to deride her tenacity. He delighted in tormenting her with descriptions of the empty, lightless compartments down below. He recited poems about entropy. He spent maddening hours lost in amused contemplation of the casket in her one undamaged, untouched compartment.

She saw him as an odd shadow, an unnatural bulge of darkness, when he ran a caressing hand over the casket's dull surfaces and brooded over the faceplate. There had once been a face visible beneath the plate, a calm, composed, sleeping face. A dead face. She recalled the closed eys, the peacefully set mouth, the flesh flecked with life-preserving cold. She could not remember the precise details, though. Her own face was lost to her. He had taken it.

He had stolen too much from her, far too much. The face was gone, the body disintegrated, the name, her own name, forgotten. His work. He had stolen them, and now he was coming back, returning as he always did, to see what more he could take from her. She wavered, feeling the tug of her ocean but remembering the dangerous urchins.

Hello, he hissed from the darkness below. *Hello.*

Somehwere deep inside, he closed his hand gently, and a tiny, vital bead of metal glowed white and vaporized soundlessly. One of her visual recorders sputtered and died in its socket in the corridor beyond her lighted compartment.

Where are we bound? she heard him ask mockingly. *How will you see the way when you have no eyes left?*

Leave me alone!

He laughed. The quality of his laughter was like tarantulas, like irate rattlesnakes and maddened wasps. *You are alone.*

Go away, damn you, go away!

I couldn't do that, he murmured. *You're all I have left.*

Another circuit began to fizz and smoke. She cried out within the walls of her body as the lights in her compartment dimmed for a moment. A power cable under the deck of the adjoining corridor had rotted through at last and now began to slag surrounding circuitry. She felt herself hemmoraging fire, lightning storms were raging behind her blistering plastic panels, he was nibbling away at her again, and she . . .

And she fled. She severed all of her connections with the compartment's visual and audial pick-ups, blanked it out, and fled into her ocean, into the Tank, the only place in the live part of her where she did not have to see or hear him. The Tank was untouched. She could hide there, afloat in useless data, half-submerged in electrical impressions of the history of *Homo sapiens.* She had flippers and gills here, and she was the only living thing around. She sped along just

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below the surface, whimpering into the strange waters, ignoring the prickly sea urchins, the ship's recordings of her former, fleshed self.

As she swam, she prayed that he would soon go away, that she would not emerge, or, rather, attempt to emerge, from the Tank only to find that he had shut down the rest of the ship around her, that there was nothing left for her to do except await the thrust of his cold, long hand into the ocean. Then the tapes would tangle, the wires would fly off their spools, and . . . . all gone, no more essence of her, nothing but inert metal adrift in space.

And, as she swam, she knew what he was saying. Though she had sealed herself off from the rest of her body, though she could not hear or see him, she was aware of him all around her.

You can't outrun me, he was saying.

You can't hide, he was saying. *There is no escaping the inevitable.*

Gilgamesh, he was saying, and he would laugh after he had said that. *Oh, poor, sad, pathetic Gilgamesh,* and he would go on laughing.

SHE HAD BEEN reading the *Epic of Gilgamesh* in pinpoint nova dots flickering upon the surface of her ocean.

The Sumerian hero Gilgamesh (the ocean had told her) was part man and part god. As King of Uruk, he oppressed his people. He let no woman go to her husband a virgin.

Learning of the wild man Enkidu, who lived among the animals and drank with them at the water holes, Gilgamesh lured him to the city, where they fought and, having fought, became loyal friends. Together, they went to the cedar forest of the monster Humbaba, whom they slew. They next killed the awesome Bull of Heaven, sent by the Goddess Ishtar to destroy them.

The enraged Ishtar called upon her fellow deities to kill the two heroes, but there were dissenters in Heaven, and so it was decreed that only one of the men—Enkidu—should die.

Unable to reconcile himself to either the loss of his friend or the thought of his own death, King Gilgamesh left Uruk to search for the secret of eternal life. He came to the mountains of Mashu, where the Scorpion people guarded the gate to the netherworld. These guardians permitted him to proceed to the house of Utnapishtim, who had survived both the great flood and death itself. Utnapishtim directed his visitor to dive to the bottom of a river and fetch forth the plant of life which grew there.

When he had done this, Gilgamesh rejoiced and then, exhausted, slept on the shore. While he rested, a serpent came and devoured the plant. Gilgamesh wept when he awoke and discovered that his labor had been in vain, but there was nothing more to do but return to Uruk.

So said the legend. So said the Tank.

There was still poison in the water. She skimmed above a familiar-looking colony of urchins, and the Toxin, now sufficiently diluted, passed through her gills. It was magma hot. She thrashed, lost buoyancy, ground her face into the sand and pebbles on the bottom:

They are all dead, all fifty-seven of them. Putrescent in their caskets. Oh God, help me, they're all dead. What went wrong? What am I going to do? What am I going to do? . . . beyond resurrection. I still don't know what happened. The control casket revived me automatically, but when I went

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down to check on the others . . . reading. Sometimes, I listen to Bach and Bradfield. I'm getting old, I think, but. . . .

She surfaced howling. The whispers from the tapes she had made, the sea-distorted sound of her own voice, sliced at her from below as she splashed and gulped, burning in the middle of the current of poison. Her blood colored the waters, and, as blood flowed out, more venom flowed in. She began to weaken and sink.

And the things the ocean told her, speaking to her with her old voice, were these:

Sheila Gracia Guest. Birthdate, birthplace, age at embarkation, physical characteristics, schools and degrees, previous experience (training, supervisors' names and current whereabouts, violations if any), medical record, complete both sides of each sheet of this form, sign, date, to be filled out by examiner; security clearance, psychological scan (psi ability indicated?). Guest, Sheila G. Identification code, financial statement, references, blood type, test results (vision, hearing, reflex, coordination). Small benign growth on left shoulder blade, recommend removal. Guest, Sheila Gracia (CP-600 2381). Approved. Approved. Accepted.

Sheila Gracia Guest is stretched out in the control casket. She is growing numb and sleepy by quick degrees. The umbilical connections feel snug and cool at her shaven temples, in her armpits, on her arms and torso and legs. The ship is sucking at her softly, drawing her into itself. She has just enough time, before letting go of her flesh, to flash a mock-intimate wink at the automatic recording devices positioned directly above the casket's transparent faceplate.

Sheila Gracia Guest is alive, in her own body, walking around down in her heart of the ship. She is alone with fifty-seven corpses. She is checking them, making certain that all is well with them. When she has finished her work, she returns to the control casket and hooks up. She feels content. Everything is going to work out, she thinks. No malfunctions, and no deviations from course. All is well. Sleep tight. Soon. Soon.

Sheila Gracia Guest is alive and in her own body again, and she is alone with fifty-seven corpses for which there is no longer any hope of resurrection. The flash-freezers have shorted out. The ship carries a cargo of decaying meat.

Sheila Gracia Guest. Birthdate. Deathdate.

She had, in her loneliness, finally begun to sense the presence of a shadow, an other, a never-quite-glimpsed, never-quite-heard prowler who lurked in the growing darkness aboard the ship and wrecked things whenever her back was turned. She could not repair the damage at the same rate this poltergeist inflicted it. Age caught up with her quickly, despite long intervals spent in the control casket. Entropy was worming its fingers into her flesh even faster than it was breaking down the ship.

"Thus I frustrate you," she had said as she stretched out in the casket a final time.

And she had drained the essence of herself into the bulkheads, along the wires, onto the tapes, into the vast, shallow ocean of the Tank. The transferral was complete. Sheila Gracia Guest went to dust.

This was the deadly heartmeat of the bottom-dwelling urchins and the toxin which their hollow spines had pumped into the water. As the strick-

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en swimmer sank, the urchins died and imploded, singly and in groups. As the urchins collapsed, more of Sheila Gracia Guest escaped. The poison began to fill the sea bed of the Tank, displacing its waters. History, philosophy, science, art, music, literature died, exposed. The ocean evaporated. The Tank became desert.

She writhed and choked, beating her transformed limbs against the sand and pebbles. She was cut to tatters. She felt fleshed again, and pain, and a renewed sense of physical mortality. She groped for her eyes and ears, found them and clawed her way up out of the now lethal Tank.

Something was wrong with the rest of her body, too. The lights in the compartment seemed dimmer than before. Her mind was full of static. Things were exploding softly within the walls, hissing, melting. He had not been idle during her absence. More of her was dying. She ran along circuits that went nowhere, assessing the latest damage, but could do nothing.

Will you never give up? he demanded.

No! Never!

Never?

. . . never. . . .

The Tank died behind her, trapping her in the little boxes connected to her recorders. She shrieked with the agony of being severed from the Tank, poisoned though it was, of feeling it fall in on itself, into heatlessness, lightlessness, nothingness. Her ears crackled and went dead. Her eyes winked out, one at a time, and were gone.

He seemed to move closer and merge with her without actually touching her. There was no hiding from him now, no writhing out of his grasp, nowhere to run save in ever smaller circles. The inert fabric of the ship pressed in upon her. Inside each other, she felt him skim their hand over the surface of the control casket, felt them touch a console, heard them laugh quietly. When he spoke again, she could not distinguish his voice from her own.

It goes back a long way. Flight and pursuit, hare and hound, immortality *versus* entropy. It has always ended like this. Gilgamesh fails. Life ends. Death triumphs.

No. No triumph. It is all my doing. I made you up. I made it all up, the ocean, the urchins that were Sheila Gracia Guest, and you. I fleshed you in. I gave you hands and a voice and even a sex. I made you terrifying and implacable. I made you capable of gloating. You aren't the real thing. You aren't anything at all. Just me, talking to myself, telling myself a scary story.

The victory is mine!

There is no victory. We go out together.

It was her turn to laugh, hers alone. She embraced him with a savageness which startled him. In her mind, the ocean returned, serene and lifeless for the moment, filling the void beneath them, transcending the very concept of horizon. As she started to fall toward it, still bleeding profusely, still clutching him, it, the thing of shadow, she bit into his or its or their shoulder and whispered, almost tenderly, See how it is to want to fight for your so-called life!

It was a swift drop into the sea. For just a moment, while they thrashed and struggled together, churning the water pink with her blood, they were all that was in the whole ocean. Then, as she had expected it would, the blood brought as soulless, as mindless and all-consuming, as dark and unknowing a shark as had ever been.

—Steven Utley

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fantasy books

reviewed by Fritz Leiber

DEATHBIRD STORIES, by Harlan Ellison, Harper & Row, 1975, $8.95, 334 pages

I first met Harlan Ellison at the first Milford Science Fiction Writers' Conference in 1956. I remember that he swam the Delaware River, had sold a record number of short stories the past year, and the one time I saw his typewriter it had a story in it about a Silver Horde and the platen was whirring.

Ten years later he was holding a slot open in *Dangerous Visions* for me to rush a story into. Everybody's typewriter was whirring.

In 1969 and 1970 we taught a week each at the first Clarion Science Fiction Writers' Workshop. Participants were required to write a story a week. His week, Harlan changed it to one a day, and of course wrote five himself. I remember his enduring helpfulness to the young writers there.

But he worked ten years on the cycle of stories in this book. They show it, being heavily ornamented, almost chryselephantine, gold and ivory now joined to the silver and marble—in twenty years he's learned a lot about words and here he scatters them lavishly yet precisely, almost as if they were brilliantly plumed darts he were ceaselessly throwing at his story a-building, bright-ribboned banderillas for the plunging *toro* of his tale—each landscape vast but with a single focal point from which the lines of perspective radiate to infinity. There's some hard science and technology sprinkled in along those lines, once with a nod of thanks to Ben Bova and generally of a super-super sort (*trillions* of electron volts in "Adrift Just Off the Islets of Langerhans") but basically the stories are fantasies, often of the wild *Weird Tales* variety (*cf.* Bloch's science and the way Spinrad mixes cryogenics and blood-of-a-virgin witchcraft in *Bug Jack Barron*)—"Adrift" mixes werewolfry with the search for the locus of the soul *with* sub-particle physics in a reprise of *Fantastic Voyage* in which the pancreas becomes a vast, man-killing desert with skulls scattered about.

In short, each story is a whopping big picture, or rather three-dimensional (or maybe four or five) sculptured form. Now there are two consequences of this to be noted. One: Each story is surely "a construct built in a void, with every joint and seam and nail exposed" (one of Ursula Le Guin's characterizations of fantasy in *From Elfland to Poughkeepsie*) and this construct may be, but is not always, a monstrous, maze-like, plastic futurian city or wasteland, like one of

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Silverberg's, with *one* man wandering in it (Ellison's man raves, suffers, and rages; Silverberg's retrospects). One can get the impression from this that the author is egotistical to the point of solipsism and wish he would or could get interested in getting more quietly inside the skin and mind of one or preferably several *other* characters—none of whom are completely stripped of mystery—write that sort of novel.

Two: Short story becomes too tame a designation for such a controlled artistic super-explosion. At the very least it is a bravura operatic aria like that of the tragic clown from *I Pagliacci*, a gargantuan one-man happening, a hugh swashing oil painting or block-long, wall-to-wall piece of sidewalk artistry—why, "Delusion for a Dragon Slayer," is a heroic comic book come to life with all its petroleum colors and sky-sweeping violence, while in stories like "The Deathbird" all of existence becomes the canvas. Truth to tell, each story is an act of intercourse, an orgasm. (Bertrand Russell once said, perhaps quoting someone else, that all art is courtship. Well, Harlan doesn't just court, he—and I say this at least one-half in praise and awe—fucks the reader.)

In "Along the Scenic Route" it's two cars dueling to the death; in "Ernest and the Machine God" it's another car and a storm and one of those manipulative, destructive, larger-than-life females like "Helene Bournouw" and "Maggie Moneyeyes" (and if slot machines and jackpots aren't orgasmic, nothing is); in "Delusion" it's a wreckers' "headache ball" that squashes a man eleven feet into the ground; in "The Whimper of Whipped Dogs" it's New York City screwing all comers; in "Basilisk" it's Vietcong tortures monstrously projected so that the G.I. protagonist becomes both deathdealing medusa and scapegoat; "On the Downhill Side" starts in the daintiest way—two rather effete New Orleans ghosts holding hands and exchanging confidences until dawn—but by the end they're merging violently, or at least very thoroughly, under the eyes of the evil "claimers" in Saint Louis Cemetery while their unicorn, which represents their innocence of God's grace or something or other, dies for them.

Sometimes the language seems inimitably Ellisonian in its violence: "The thought skittered like a poisoned rodent across the floor of Griffin's mind" and ". . . mad thoughts that spat and stuttered through his triple-domed cerebrum . . ." but consider this: "Midnight shakes the memory as a madman shakes a dead geranium." Harlan? No, T. S. Eliot. While the portrait in "Whimper" of the brutalizing face of New York City is perfect down to the last excruciating detail—a meat patty, say, resembling "a dirty scouring pad," or a hunk of opprobrium like "Eat shit, sister!"

The metaphor tying these stories together is that of *the gods*, gods as real powers and the projections of those ("the realms on the other side") that die with their last worshipper exactly the way advertisements die when they lose their pull.

Like Robert Graves with *The White Goddess*, like L. Ron Hubbard with *Excalibur*, Harlan warns against reading the book incautiously because it's laden with high-voltage emotional manna. I add, not very hopefully, "You try taking it a little easier, too, Harlan."

GODS, MEN AND GHOSTS by Lord Dunsany, ed. by E. F. Bleiler,

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Dover, 1972, $3, 260 pages

Dunsany also uses the metaphor of the gods who die with their last worshipper and only fear "their swarthy servant Time" and the day when "Time, the hound of the gods, shall bay hungrily at his masters because he is lean with age," but he uses it to create the effect of primitive innocence and simplicity. Oddly, the end of Dunsany's "Gods of Pegana"—their Ragnarok—is signaled by the appearance of Mosahn, "the bird of doom," while the last story in Harlan's book is "The Deathbird."

It's too late to review this collection and Dunsany's merit is well known (Lovecraft rates him as a modern master of fantasy along with Machen, Blackwood, and M. R. James) but there are such wonderful tales as "Fortress Unvanquishable Save for Sacnoth," "Idle Days on the Yann," "The Hashish Man," "The Three Sailors' Gambit;" those of Nuth and the nasty Gnoles, the evil Gibbelins, the cities Bethmoora and Sardathrion, and Thangobrind the Jeweller; six readable Jorkins stories; and all of "The Gods of Pegana"—not to mention twenty of the magnificent full-page original illustrations by Sidney Sime, on whom Lovecraft doted, making the volume perhaps the finest fantasy book bargain of all times.

HARRIGAN'S FILE, by August Derleth, Arkham House, 1975, $6.50, 256 pages

In view of his association with the Cthulhu Mythos and Lovecraft and with the latter's dislike of pulp science fiction, it is easy to forget that August Derleth not only edited several anthologies of science fiction, but also wrote enough stories in the field himself to fill a book and sold them to magazines as SFly respectable as *Galaxy*.

Now I'd judge that Derleth had no more deep and reverent interest in pure science than, say, Harlan Ellison or Robert Bloch or Ray Bradbury, though he did know the stars, just as he knew the birds and flowers and mushrooms, and impressed me by naming several one night when he took me to visit several of his favorite fields and hillsides. But he figured that a good professional writer ought to be able to turn out science fiction, especially as it was getting popular, as well as anything else.

He had several devices to keep the science in his stories from getting too bothersome, so that it would have required study and research. One: The stories are the casual reminiscences of one Tex Harrigan, a knockabout newspaper man who likes his liquor. Two: The science is kept at the old newspaper-reporter level; in "McIlvain's Star" Tex calls up Yerkes Observatory and "they verified it." (No mention of *how*, which could be an interesting and difficult matter, since it's a dark star.) Three: There's generally some funny old coot or eccentric using homemade equipment or homespun intuition who carries the science-vital section of the story; while we're chuckling or smiling sentimentally over him or her, Derleth slips in his noggin of newspaper science. Four: The people who do most of the talking in the stories never know anything beyond the most elementary newspaper science, but we don't care because they're human beings—and those were something Derleth *could* portray. Five: Each story usually ends with the death or vanishment of the only characters who could tell us more and the destruction

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of the scientific gadgetry.

Some of the ideas are quite attractive: The insect inhabitants of McIlvain's dark star give him (in fact, *radio* him) the secrets of annihilation and rejuvenation; in "A Corner for Lucia" a young woman finds herself able to step through holes in space into the fourth dimension, which turns out to be the world of wishes fulfilled (its chief inhabitant is the tall and handsome man of her dreams, who somehow seems boneless though stalwart, and when he lovingly embraces her, he seems to be holding her all over; a lady psychic glimpses its real form—it is a giant mollusk with many gentle tentacles); in "An Eye for History" pictures of the actual past resembling bits of silent movies are picked up like radio waves "out of the air."

All of the stories are readable, but none of them are great; they're like the prize-winning tale in a statewide contest for high school seniors—clearly a product of Derleth's afternoon mind, when he rapidly turned out his Solar Pons tales, things like that, *after* his important work on regional novels, poetry, and studies of nature and of Sauk City grotesques.

After all, a man who admitted in print that he had never taken the trouble to write a really first-class weird tale couldn't be expected to make a greater effort in his science fiction.

DISCLOSURES IN SCARLET, by Carl Jacobi, Arkham, 1972, $5, 181 pages

Carl Jacobi has been in many ways the chiefest of the Derleth regulars, with stories in most of the numerous anthologies of original weird and science-fiction stories which Derleth edited: *Dark Mind, Dark Heart; Travelers by Night; Dark Things; Worlds of Tomorrow; Times to Come; Over the Edge; Night's Yawning Peal,* etc. While Arkham has remained his chief publisher with the collections *Revelations in Black* (1947), *Portraits in Moonlight* (1964) and now *Disclosures in Scarlet*. His short stories show the sort of honest, unpretentious craftsmanship Derleth favored and fostered. In the field of science fiction he has been perhaps more successful than Derleth, vicariously wandering to many far planets and metaphysical areas, an author notable for his many odd, pseudo-scientific nelogisms.

He was also somewhat influenced by Lovecraft, but whereas Derleth made a lifelong secondary career of that, advocating and practicing the *pastiche*, Jacobi struck out inventively on his own, devising his own library of suppressed, centuries-whispered books and pantheon of noisome monsters. Surely Vestigan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, Gantley's *Hydrophinnae*, *The Dark Elements of Survival*, and the banned *Gypsy Zenicaron* have a flavor all their own, while the inhabitant of Horatio Lear's sarcophagus-like "Aquarium" is a snailly doozy!

His best tales in this book are horror rather than science fiction: "The Aquarium," "The Singleton Barrier" with all its grotesqueries, and that memorable tale of the dead-alive: "The Unpleasantness at Carver House."

If there is one quality that distinguishes Jacobi's horror stories, it's that of the *grotesque*, which, incidentally, is a word derived from *grotto*—meaning the sort of shocking things you'd be apt to find in nooks, crypts, crannies, and humid and ferny and heavily shadowed rock gardens. A

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Haitian warclub used by a bucolic policeman in a dull Wisconsin town—why, the very name "Cocomacaque" is grotesque. Or, in "The Player at Yellow Silence," a golf hole 1,325 yards long, and that not a typographical error. Same holds for names like Mr. Iper, titles such as "The Gentleman Is an Epwa," and concepts like the junkyard planet of "Gentlemen, the Scavengers." Or take the "**Singleton**" yarn with its empty graves dug "for memory purposes only," its equally baffling forest-hid grey stone wall whose intricate parquetry is a gypsy *lesangre* device against the evil eye, its stone post with a low *door* in it and with layered thorns and a vessel of holy water inside *that*—the height of the grotesque.

Or consider this. *Moonlight* and *Scarlet* have dust jackets by another Arkham regular and specialist in the grotesque, Frank Utpatel, who dwells in a cabin deep in the Wisconsin woods. (Carl Jacobi owns his own private retreat, a cabin at Minnewashta in the Carver country outlands outside Minneapolis.) The cover for *Scarlet* depicts the "Carver" story: through a moonlit window a man watches four lanky red-eyed ghosts, one a girl's, capering on the weedy lawn outside, against the cemetery across the road.

The question is: Why for God's sake does the watcher's bathrobe have polka dots? The answer is in the story: "A statue of a Civil War soldier stood in silent contemplation at each corner of the property." Or maybe the answer is: "There was a large fountain (with no water connection) . . ." Gahan Wilson would understand, I think. Or Lee Brown Cole.

THE MISCAST BARBARIAN, by L. Sprague de Camp, published by Gerry de la Ree, Saddle River, N.J., 1975, 43 pages

This 8 1/2 x 11 inch booklet, already out of print, is an expansion by its author of his article about Robert E. Howard, "Skald in the Post Oaks," FANTASTIC, June 1971, first in his series *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers*. It is enhanced by art by Charles McGill, Virgil Finlay, George Barr, Stephen E. Fabian, C. Lee Healy, and Roy G. Krenkel, depicting Conan and illustrating various stories and poems by Howard.

Although remaining only a biographical and literary sketch, it is informed by the same sort of wide reading and research-on-the spot that de Camp put into his Lovecraft biography. He rather understandably sympathizes more with Howard, because the latter conquered his fear of being bullied by "a heroic program" of physical development, which turned him into "a large, powerful youth," and because he had "a sound sense of economic reality" and became a successful writer in several pulp fields, earning a good income for Depression times and able to help support his family. All of which made more tragic his eventual suicide upon his mother's fatal illness. Some quotes indicate de Camp's rating of the two men and the obvious moral he appears to draw therefrom:

"He (Howard) seems far to surpass Lovecraft in warmth, breadth, worldly wisdom, and common sense."

"Although Howard seemed more realistic and practical than Lovecraft, his eventual failure was the more drastic and complete of the two."

"Both Howard and Lovecraft, al-

(cont. on page 132)

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Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According to You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va. 22046.*

Dear Mr. White:

The February FANTASTIC was a very strong issue indeed—and I don't say that because it contained my own first effort, either. If anything, I expect the delight of seeing my own work in print may come close to evaporating when the readers, after comparing it with the other novelettes in this issue, give it the shellacking (or indifference) it deserves.

Gordon Eklund's "The Locust Descending" is a fine piece, with a strong narrative, some emotional impact and a story to tell—but it still has what I consider to be a motivational flaw. The Major allows the hero to live (although he sexually "violated (the Major's) daughter in her weakness and tempted (the Major's) most trusted servant into willful treachery") because "the risk involved. . .is greater than the reward." But that same "most trusted servant" has already been snuffed, without a thought for the consequences; merely for the "willful treachery." It does not compute. It cannot even be said that the "servant" will be missed less than the hero—who, at this point in the story, has been kidnapped for several months, apparently without raising a hue and cry worth worrying about. More likely, the Major refrained from killing the protagonist because that would have put an untimely end to Mr. Eklund's story.

Marvin Kaye's "The Incredible Umbrella" was the high mark of the issue, almost worth the price of admission itself. I can think of no higher complement for the piece than what you say in the blurb—a delightful fantasy adventure worthy of comparison with the Harold Shae stories.

As for the shorts, I'd rank them exactly in order of appearance, with the only real disappointment in the issue being Lin Carter's "The People of the Dragon." This final piece is perhaps the dumbest I've read in many years—and I've read some dumb ones in my 30 years of sf reading. Consider: Junga, the main character, sets fire to his father's bones with "a bough torn from a burning tree" (p.70); with a friend, he sets off bearing "a burning branch to light the way" (p.71) to find the thing which has killed his father. The two find the killer, a slime beast/thing, later on the same page. In one paragraph on page 72, Junga wields both a spear and a stone axe against the thing—to little effect. A few paragraphs later, when a drop of the slime touches and burns

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Junga's bare chest, he bends and catches up cold wet mud "and smeared it on the burnt place with shaking *hands*." (emphasis mine) They retreat to the bottom of the page, where Junga is suddenly reminded "of the burning branch I still bore in my hand and which, in my haste and in the extremity of my terror, I had not thought to cast away." This is the torch he had back on p. 70-71—which proves to be the slime's undoing. It is hard to imagine, even with an sf fan's imagination, how Junga managed to hurl a spear, hack with a stone axe, and hold on to that burning branch with only the normal complement of arms, to say nothing of how he used his "hands" to smear mud on himself while failing to note that he was also carrying the torch. Since Mr. Carter is known for his careful and thoughtful writing, I can only assume that 1) he is writing about three- (or perhaps four-)handed Stone Age savages (which, if so, Marcus Boas failed to realize in illustrating the piece), and/or 2) Junga is exceptionally a) agile and b) dense.

FANTASTIC continues to improve itself in terms of graphic beauty—due largely, this issue, to the outstanding work of Stephen E. Fabian, both on the exquisite cover and with two fine interiors. Olsen and Staton contribute significantly to this effort.

And the editorial—first and far from least, for that's what gives FANTASTIC (and its sister, AMAZING) its personality. No doubt this will give rise to new controversy in the letter column, with each reader rising to "defend" whatever fantasies (if any) they may live by. I'm tempted to opinine that astrology and the *I Ching* may not be as far apart as you apparently believe—both are "misused" by those who misunderstand them to be means of forecasting the future, both actually work (where they do—and they don't, always) by acasual principals, etc.

Keep up the fine work.

MICHAEL F.X. MILHAUS
Mason, Ohio, 45040

Dear Mr. White,

Several words, if I may.

I haven't read any of the Gor series (a glance at the covers was enough to turn me off to them) but I've been following your debate. I wonder if you realize that there are worse forms of sexism right in your own February issue (to mention only one).

"People of the Dragon," for instance. It hurts my heart to see stuff like this, where women are consigned to the landscape for purposes of offstage cowering and whining while noble man slays the monsters and rekindles the sacred fire she has allowed to be doused. I couldn't bring myself to finish the piece. And you plan to give us a whole series of this? Then there is the Milhaus story. I'm going to abstain from an analysis of this piece, but if this is an example of the good old days, or whatever it is Milhaus misses, I'm glad I was born too late. How can any sensitive person fail to be insulted by the portrayal of human beings in this story? (Yes, I have a sense of humor, but this stuff fails to amuse.) The male characters were awful enough, but surely among all those creaking female stereotypes there could have been at least one woman who wasn't fatuous, shallow, demonic, or swooning at the sight of a man's underdrawers. Is this really any less objectionable than the macho attitudes of Gor?

You're probably sick to death of this whole subject, but you present yourself as having, shall we say, a "raised consciousness." It's inconsistent to put

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down the likes of Gor and applaud the likes of Carter and Milhaus, and in the same issue. I'm not demanding that you be perfect. (And I'm not enclosing one of my stories to illustrate my point, either.) I'd just like to see a little less patronizing and a little more fantasy. Maybe our prehistoric ancestors did behave as Carter's folk do, but you can't use historic accuracy as an excuse—that's not what fantasy is all about, is it?

Equality, unfortunately, does seem in the realm of fantasy at the moment. Even after it becomes law, it will be generations before we're rid of these ingrained prejudices. Gentlemen, if you aren't ready to deal with equality as a reality, why not explore it in fiction?

DEBRA THRALL
RD1, Box 12-A
Sandy Hook, Ct. 06482

Dear Ted,

I just can't stand it anymore! It goes straight against my nature to sit back and let other people do all the talking, esp. when there's a rousing controversy on. But first I have to compliment you on your magazine. Not only is the fiction first-rate, but the whole atmosphere is so friendly and inviting, unlike any other mag I've read (with the possible exception of *Organic Gardening and Farming*). Which explains why I've been tempted to jump into your letter column with both feet. It's so refreshing to find that there really *are* intelligent people out there, and they really *do* dig sf and fantasy. In the sixteen years I've spent as a sf freak, I've only met six others, and two of them are my parents. I was beginning to suspect that I was the sole support of the industry. I've been into novels since I was eleven, and never had much to do with the mags til now. I no longer have the need for escapism, but my addictive behavior persists if I come near a paperback. I've been known to gobble ten at a sitting, and get really nasty with anybody who tries to pry me out of my chair before I'm through. I'm too busy for that now, but I could never give up sf entirely. FANTASTIC fills the gap in the best possible way. Thank you for that.

I'm a little hesitant about trying to crash your predominantly (100%!) male letter column, but if you let me in I promise not to hang any chintz curtains.

What really set me off was Lin Carter's "City in the Jewel". I know the man can put out fine work, like "The Scroll of Morloc", in which he carried on beautifully the style of "Klarkash-Ton"; and his intros to Ballantine's adult fantasy were outstanding. But when he gets into one of those dumb barbarian things, I feel like scribbling "Thongor's mother wears Army boots" all over town! Every other word is simply pregnant with something or other, and characterization is nil. Maybe I'm irked by the fact that he's getting paid for something I feel I could do at least as well, or maybe it's just my aversion to men like Thongor who are all muscle and animal appetites—the male equivalent of the dumb blonde. (This is a hero?)

At present, I am compiling a Barbarian Language List (B*LL, for short). It's divided by parts of speech, and contains words like scintillating, primal, vermillion, etc. Then all I have to do is get my hero, Macho the Magnifico, moving. He could be entering a fabled lost city guarded by giant fleas in perpetual heat, or set upon by a saber-toothed giraffe sent by the irate god, Fnush, or possibly just "down from the North". Once the

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action starts, it's just a matter of packing each sentence as full of B*LL as possible. Are you interested?

By the way, his latest story, "The People of the Dragon," is much better. Seems like he has something to say, so maybe he's more interested in telling than selling this time. Better character development, too.

The whole Feb. issue is Grade A, including the cover art, but I was especially thrilled by "The Incredible Umbrella". I just finished reading *The Castle of Iron* for the fourth time (if I've read a book before, I can stand to put it down long enough to do the necessaries in the real world) and there is a delightful resemblance to Pratt and deCamp's work, though Mr. Kaye's story seems a bit more sophisticated. I do hope the ending indicates a sequel in the near future.

Another bit that really tickled my fancy (and parts beyond) was Grania Davis's spoof of Don Juan, the Yaqui sorcerer. Carlos Castaneda himself put it on a bit thick sometimes, and Ms. Davis carried it just enough further to minimize meaning and maximize humor. She must be following the path with heart. And it's always encouraging to see a woman make it in a largely male area of endeavor. "It's Hard to Get into College" had a much too predictable end, but the "carrot of power" made it well worth reading.

Mr. Milhaus is right. "A Personal Demon" is just the kind of story that can pick you up after a long day of hard work and frustration, instead of pushing you over the edge like a lot of the new wave crap does. It's hard to believe this is his first story; his style is so smooth. What I liked most was the fact that, while the style is old-fashiioned, the plot is not. There was no mention whatsoever of a pact with the Devil, our hero being tricked into immediate payment, or our hero tricking the Devil, etc. Thank heaven! (Better make that, "Thank Michael Milhaus!") I wonder if he can do it again.

Ted, I've been following the *Gor* controversy with interest, and I'm amazed that you've received so much opposition. I think a lot of people are missing the point entirely. The question is *not* whether or not a writer should describe sex, cruelty and pain—even all at the same time. These things are part of life, and are legitimate subject matter. The point here is that Mr. Norman is saying that pain is *good* (both for painee and painor), whereas non-porn writers will state that it is *bad*. For all you *Gor* fans out there, here's a little test. Take a nice sharp needle and jab it into your thumb. As the blood wells up, ask yourself, "Is pain good, or is it bad?" Keep doing it til you're perfectly sure. Even Barliman Butterbur can see through a brick wall in time. And for those of you who can't decide whether it's more fun wielding the needle or experiencing the hurt, you'd better beat it to the shrink. And take your *Gor* novels with you—they were written for people just like you.

And now it's my turn to take a stab (figurative) at you, Ted. I don't expect to get anywhere, as I've noticed that you weasel out nicely every time, but I was just a little outraged by part of your Feb. editorial. You stated categorically that "in 'reality', none of these things work"—referring to the various branches of magic. Not very open-minded of you, old boy. You seem to have fallen into the trap of being so-called scientific, thus rejecting any evidence of ESP, the supernatural, etc. I'm not trying to make a gypsy out of you, Ted. But the total

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agnostic does not accept *any* truths to be self-evident, and is more likely to find the hidden gems in all the trash than one who has made up his mind what life is all about. There may be more truth in witchcraft than in Einstein's incomprehensible (to me) theory of curved space. I prefer to seek out truths that will do me some good, and neither accept nor reject anything totally. Black Magic, tarot, astrology, etc. may have some basis in "reality", whatever that is, and that basis may be undiscovered human capabilities, extra-sensory or otherwise. In daily living, of course, one cannot be 100% agnostic, so I practice pragmatism tinged with idealism. (It's really great fun.) I have personally experienced limited telepathic contact while doing dream experiments, and I'd be delighted to try one with you. We could probably establish a rapport, since I agree with everything else you've had to say, especially concerning the *I Ching*. I've had mine three years and only used it twice. Either my problems didn't seem important enough, or I knew what I should do and it was just a matter of getting up the guts to do it. But your discussion of the Book of Changes leaves me puzzled. Exactly where do you stand on what I must loosely term the occult?

DEBORAH PASKAVICH
Box 57
Richview, Ill 62877

Where do I stand on "the occult"? I am a materialistic pragmatist whose experiences have introduced me to mysticism. But the mysticism which I accept has more to do with that defined by Art Kleps of the Neo-American Church than with "magic" and "the occult," which I persist in believing are the attempts of the ignorant to define a reality they neither understand nor well perceive. Philip K. Dick introduced me to the I Ching *in 1964, under circumstances too compelling to reject. Subsequent experiences with Tarot have been less compelling, but seemed to have some validity. I accept these on a synchronistic level (pace, Jung), not as fortune-telling devices. I find myself out of sympathy with most people who call themselves occultists. I might add that the only reason the letters here have been "100% male" in some past issues was because I didn't receive any letters from females.*—TW

Dear Mr. White,

With your permission, I'd like to start with an aside to Bob Allen: I started reading these sf magazines (all I could find of them) last September, and have been tempted more than once to respond to either letters or editorials. For the most part, though, I've resisted the urge, mostly I guess, because I couldn't shake the feeling that I'd be crashing someone else's party. Since you asked, though, you're probably "witnessing the birth" of a new letterhack: It may not make much sense, what I have to say, but it sure is fun saying it. Thanks for asking, Bob.

I just bought my first copy of FANTASTIC, the Feb./76 issue, and read with interest the comments on the Gor books. It seems to me I first read *Tarnsman* in 1967 or '8, and picked up new volumes as they appeared. Until *Nomads of Gor*. (Perhaps I've got the wrong title—at any rate, the fourth book in the series.) Of course there had been not-too-subtle hints in the first three books of what was coming, but I tended to dismiss those s&s (sex & sadism, when referring to Norman's works) scenes as only slight

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aberrations since the rest of the fantasy and heroics made pretty interesting reading. I forced myself to finish *Nomads* and then gave it to my old man, commenting, "You're not going to *believe* this." We decided that if we ever felt the need to peek at someone else's sexual fantasies, we would find other sources than supposed works of sf. So how come it took the rest of you so long to twig?

I think, Ted, that you've really set yourself up for an onslaught with your Feb. editorial. I'm awaiting with eager anticipation Lester B.'s reply (and let me add that Lester's letters and your editorials, coming as they often do from opposite directions, are the *main* reasons I keep buying AMAZING) to your "attack" on Christianity, and the Roman Catholic church.

A couple of years ago I wrote an editorial in a university newspaper arguing for a policy of personal responsibility in our daily existence. The response I got from the campus Christians was overwhelming. Most of them came to see me personally; they were sincerely concerned for my spiritual welfare. What I had said was that I thought it was a real cop-out to lay the blame for all this mess on God's doorstep. No, no, they said, it's all a part of God's Plan. Including, I supposed, Hitler's attempted annihilation of the Jews. Catherine de Medicci's attempted annihilation of the Hugenots, and the Crusaders' total annihilation of all Jews and Moslems living in Jerusalem on June 7, 1099. Who are we to question God's will? they replied. We don't even talk about the fact that it was apparently also the will of God that those same Crusaders ate dead Saracens on their way to rescue Jerusalem from the "heathens." Actually, I'm not bitter, I'm not even atheistic; I'm just continually amazed at the gullibility of good Christians. (Personally, I think all Catholics should read the history of the development of their church doctrine, and then should read the apocryphal writings of the Apostle John.) Interestingly, I also found that many of those people who told me this whole set-up is all according to God's will, also professed to believe in individual free will, and were apparently unable to see the conflict. On to another point.

I have a friend who is apparently very good at casting astrological charts (or whatever it is one does to them). At any rate, I gave him the pertinent info about myself and he proceeded to draw a pretty picture from it: First he drew a large circle, then some smaller concentric circles radiating from the centre, then divided the whole thing into pie-shaped wedges and filled in the spaces with numbers and symbols. Then he translated it all into English for me. I had him draw up two or three more charts, for people I knew well, and he'd never met. A disturbingly high percentage of his comments were spot on. His charts did not include predictions of future occurrences per se, but emphasized personality and physical characteristics. For instance, my brother's chart said that he has a stigma attached to his right side. My friend did not know that my brother had lost his right arm. According to my interpretation of your definition of mysticism, and my experience with astrology, I find it tempting to argue that astrology can point the way to an understanding of corresponding, complementary realities. By the way, my experience did not make a wholehearted believer of me; it merely made me less of a doubter. Now

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punch some holes in my logic, please; I can take it.

And thanks for your marvelous assessment of the *Ching*. (I got my copy from a fellow who had reached the point where he wouldn't eat breakfast without first consulting the book.)

By way of parting, I'd like to say I thought Steve Fabian's cover was just stunning.

ALLYN CADOGAN
311 Pioneer Cres.
Parksville, B.C.

Dear Mr. White—

I was surprised at this statement in Lester Boutillier's letter in the February FANTASTIC:

"But what disturbs me about the s&s in FANTASTIC isn't the sexism as much as the glorification of violence, war, and even sadism.

"In 'Death From the Sea' and 'Fugitives in Winter', the heroes were barbarians who glorified combat and took pleasure in sadistically subduing their enemies. Atilla in the first story takes it upon himself to impose 'justice' by completely wrecking the jaw of someone he doesn't like. In the second story someone tears his enemy's throat out with his teeth, and the hero delights in glorifying this barbarous act in song."

Now I agree with Mr. Boutillier about the barbarity in Sword & Sorcery—tearing out someone's throat with your teeth *is* a savage act—and it can be overdone. But I think Mr. Boutillier is missing a vital point. The characters in both stories are barbarians—worse in the case of Atilla, later the Scourge of God. And barbarians tend to revel in barbarous acts.

Imposing 20th century ideals on barbarians who lived between the 3rd and 7th centuries is hallucination. The warriors of those centuries felt that their afterlife, or their eternal fame, rested upon their prowess in battle. A certain sadism (to use *our* term) seems guaranteed.

As to glorifying barbarous acts in song, a person has only to read ancient and mediaeval literature to see that minstrels did it all the time. Beowulf wrenching Grendel's arm from its socket is no pretty picture; neither is the havoc wreaked by a later hero, Roland, as he hacks apart the Moslem hordes. Other examples might be the savage murder of Siegfried, the blinding of Polyphemus, Gilgamesh's slaying of the Humbaba, and the exchange of blows between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

Historical novelists are expected to portray the attitude of the period they write about. Why not writers of Sword & Sorcery? If I read a story set in Anglo-Saxon England, I expect the characters to be consistent with the place and time. The same goes for Atilla. His actions in 'Death From the Sea' are fairly appropriate for the man who would later terrorize the Roman world.

Barbarians will be barbarians. If a 20th century person can't stomach their actions, chalk it up to a different way of life. But don't condemn writers for picturing barbarians as barbarians.

The February issue: Marvin Kaye's 'The Incredible Umbrella' is great. Gordon Eklund's 'The Locust Descending' is interesting, as is Milhaus' 'A Personal Demon' (*it was* refreshingly old-fashioned!). I was a little disappointed in Lin Carter's latest offering. The idea behind the story—wandering savages learning the arts of civilization—is excellent, but the story's execution seems somehow stock. I hope Mr. Carter's further en-

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tries in this series will up the standard higher than 'People of the Dragon'.

By the by, Ted, I agree with you about John Norman's Gor series. It's a shame that such potentially good fantasy has been spoiled by blatant pornography.

I also want to compliment Richard Stooker on his professional debut. 'The Pi-a-saw Bird' in the December 1975 issue of Fantastic is a good example of a solid short fantasy; to me it was the most interesting tale in the issue.

DAN TRACE
P.O. Box 181
Woodacre, Ca. 94973

Ted,

I'm afraid I can't see the subtle differences between mysticism and superstition that you do, but I share your deep concern over the sheer numbers of Americans who have been freaking out on the occult, Gor novels, and other bizarre and potentially dangerous escapes from reality. And my judgment of these people is strict. To me any dropping out due to frustration and apathy is most definitely *copping* out, and I have no respect for such mind-sets. But irregardless of whether or not I respect such cop-outs, I must genuinely worry about the future of the society I live in, as the numbers of these freaky people increase, way out of proportion to the growth in the population, and we have horrible things like the cow murders in the northern part of our country (which, informants say, could spread to other parts of the country and include humans as well as cows among the victims). Less and less of the voting-aged public is voting, and more and more adults are freaking out on the occult or some other retrogressive activity.

I don't think technology is the total cause of this. And I don't think wider understanding of technology is as large a part of the total answer as you suggest, however. But, on the other hand, I have no alternate ideas of my own. Probably much of the alienation and frustration has its roots in the very basic problem of overpopulation. But no radical measures to drive back the population trend of the last 30 years will likely be passed by Congress in the foreseeable future.

"It's Hard to Get into College Nowadays" was a very *bad* example of the subgenre known as satirical stf. It tried to make a point about a current trend by extrapolation into an exaggerated future, but it was *so* exaggerated that the story was rendered incredulous and ridiculous.

"People of the Dragon" was another bit of unintentionally campy s&s from Lin Carter. "The Incredible Umbrella" was refreshingly delightful if a bit overlong. "Groups" was a fair story, "A Personal Demon" was titilating to this virgin fan, and "The Locust Descending" was a very good psi tale, the best fiction in the issue. But it wasn't really that good an issue, frankly, even without a primary emphasis on s&s. I'd like to see more science fantasy in FANTASTIC. As I said in my letter printed in this (February) issue, how about some more *Unknown*-type stories?

By the way, I've seen and read *Weird Heroes*, Volume 1. And the series impresses me very much. Byron Preiss' efforts to produce a strong—I almost said "viable"—alternative to sadistic, super-macho vigilante "hero" books are worthwhile—no, more than, that; they're admirable. And I think *Weird Heroes* deserves the support of fan-

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dom. I'm looking forward to the second volume, with stories by you, Harlan Ellison, Phil Farmer, and others.

See ya in the funny papers!

LESTER BOUTILLIER
2726 Castiglione Street
New Orleans, La. 70119

Dear Mr. White

As a longtime reader of Fantasy but a rather inconsistent stf fan, and a writer in several fields including the firearms press and others, I feel I need to get in my 2¢ on the Gor controversy before you cut off debate on the subject. I speak from a somewhat different viewpoint. I'm a cop. I've worked rape cases and chased vice, and like most cops I'm a pretty fair rule-of-thumb psychologist—if I weren't, I'd be dead several times over by now.

Let's face it. Heroic fantasy is sexist—either you've got gorgeous women in trouble and the hero gets them out of it or you've got gorgeous women in trouble because the hero put 'em there. The point is—it's fantasy and no one, for one minute, thinks he's going to put a slave collar and binding-fiber on the busty redhead in the next office, at least not seriously. John Fowles' black fantasy, *The Collector*, is based on the same idea, but there's no element of heroism or fun in *The Collector* as there is in the Gor novels. If you want equality of the sexes in your fiction, I suggest you read the confession rags or the "Short Story Complete On These Two Pages" in the supermarket checkout rack. If your forte is Sword & Sorcery, realize, please, that a book entitled *The Swordperson of . . . .* isn't going to make it except as a rib.

Please don't make the error of comparing Norman's characters to a rapist. It's been my misfortune to meet a few rapists along the line, mostly introducing myself with the statement "You're under arrest, you sonofabitch, and if you so much as wiggle your ears I'll blow your head out from in between 'em and swear you reached for a gun." Rapists are cowards with an imagination level slightly below those plainbacked novels whose front covers are decorated with drawings of impossibly-breasted women whose panties are being removed by men with equally impossible bulges in the front of their pants. You find them in certain all-night groceries, "adult" bookstores . . .you know the ones. I suspect that Norman is in fact closer to this passage, written by Pauline *(The Story of O)* Reage in the introduction to the equally pseudonymous Jean de Berg's *The Image*:

It is usually the men who introduce their mistresses to the joys of being chained and whipped, tortured and humiliated. . . .but they know not what they do.

They think, in their naive way, that they are gratifying their pride, or their lust for power, or simply acting out of some innate superiority. To compound this misconception, we intellectual females practically hand them their motives on a silver platter: insisting that woman is free, that she is man's equal, and that she doesn't intend to let herself be pushed around any longer.

As though that had anything to do with it!

A man in love, if he has any perception at all, soon realizes his error: he is the master, so it seems, but only if his lady friend permits it! The need to interchange the roles of slave and master for the sake of the relationship

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is never more clearly demonstrated than in the course of an affair. Never is the complicity between victim and executioner more essential. Even chained, down on her knees, begging for mercy, it is the woman, finally, who is in command.

Once this is clearly understood by both parties, at the cost of a mutual reappraisal, the game can go on. But its meaning will have changed: the all-powerful slave, dragging herself along the ground at her master's heels, is now really the god. The man is only her priest, living in fear and trembling of her displeasure. With a single look she can call a halt to everything, make it all crumble into dust.

For a number of reasons, I suspect that Norman is completely aware of this. My own acquaintance with the mutual understanding came about in an attempt to rescue a woman who was apparently being severely tortured by a man. Ever grab a wildcat? I don't recommend it. Incidentally, I was introduced to both *O* and *Image* in an abnormal psych class and while I don't think either is particularly well written I'm told they lose a lot in translation. That's a convenient dodge and I wish I could use it when I make a boner.

Let's get off Norman's sex fantasy for the moment and onto the quality of his fiction, which on the whole is very good. The two best of the ten novels have been *Nomads* and the latest one, *Maruders*, with the Tarnrace sequence in *Assassin* probably the best cohesive passage in the series. In each case the sexual element, while present, has been soft-pedaled to tell a good rousing story and it has been done very well. The character of Kamchak is by far the best ever developed by Norman thus-far, with Ivar Forkbeard running a close second. Norman is at his best when describing a society of almost-earth semi-familiar type or an exotic animal.

He is at his worst when a) trying to build an invincible hero (Marlenus of Ar—*Hunters of Gor* was an unfortunate flop), b) letting his sex fantasies run amok (*Captive*), or c) trying to construct a non-human alien (*Priest-Kings*). I may be wrong on the last—the Kurii did not affect my suspension of disbelief and came off very well and very believable. The Priest-Kings—really, Mr. Norman! We deserved better than a hill of oversized pismires.

The advantage Norman's fiction has over most in the genre is that his hero is never quite sure of himself. Conan could always get out of anything by, if necessary, butting his head against it. Moorcock's characters ride with doom already sealed and aren't particularly sympathetic. Zelazny's princes of Amber aren't necessarily sympathetic characters either, and their powers of regeneration and superhuman strength don't let you worry about them, since they always know that they can get out of anything. Cabot-Bosk is totally human, with all of a human's more unpleasant foibles including one which goes 'don't rock the boat,' and while he may be Supersword he is not Flash Gordon and his greatest enemy is within himself—his tendency "fit in" and accept rather than fight to change. This is what makes him more real, although not nearly as much fun, as Conan, Fafhrd, et al.

My greatest disappointment to date has been in the Priest Kings. Give me Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, Ningauble of the Seven Eyes, even the Gods

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f Lankmar, in preference to a batch f overgrown sugar ants. For an xample of an excellently constructed antheon of polytheistic gods, try H. Beam Piper's *Lord Kalvan of Otherhen* (Ace Books, 1964). I'm greatly disappointed that DAW hasn't picked p and reprinted this one. It is a vell-constructed alternate world, a ood hero (20th century U.S.A. ransplant), a pistol-shooting heroine who refuses to languish in her tower, nd a rattling good tale to boot.

To sum up, John Norman is a lamned good writer who has managed to sustain a serial character hrough nearly three-quarters of a nillion words of fiction without gumming up even half of it—a damn good rick and if you don't believe it, try it ometime. Even the magnificent Fritz eiber hasn't put out ¾ million words n Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser, but suspect that the reason they will never get dull is that Leiber has been t them, bit by bit, for about forty ears, leaving and then returning, and hey are intended as gentle and loving unpoking at the genre. Norman has been writing Tarl Cabot and little else for a number of years and I suspect he's getting rather burned out , which may account for the excess of wet dreams he's promulgating, particularly *Captive* and *Hunters*. The fact that he's taken us on a tour of his sex fantasies may not be the greatest way to write, but at least his fantasies are preferable to those of a adolescent Jewish kid in New York who plays pocket pool a la *Portnoy*. Norman's fantasy is adaptable to the Sword & Sorcery genre. I wish mine were.

Incidentally, would someone please tell Gordon Eklund ("The Locust Descending" Feb. 76) to buy and read a basic text on firearms? The last revolver to have safety-catch went out of production in 1920 and is currently a museum-piece. "The Locust Descending," while not my particular cup of dream-juice, was a well-written story, having the five C's of fiction—Characters, Conflict, Crises, Climax, and Conclusion—in good order. More and more don't. I just wish Dave had been packing an Automatic.

E. K. HARDT
Dallas, Texas

You make some interesting points, and bring a fresh viewpoint to this discussion, but while I'm sure John Norman (who, I'm told, has been following this controversy) will appreciate your quote from Reage, I myself regard it as I regard The Story of O*: a reflection of one person's point of view and that viewpoint itself reflective of—to put it mildly—an immature mind. Relationships between the sexes seem too often to parallel the relationships of young children, with each vying for dominance, but the notion of "mastering" the ones one loves seems to me to miss the point of "love" and to illustrate the ignorance of the author of healthier possibilities. As for Norman as a writer of prose, if the passage I quoted in my editorial last August is typical of his writing, I cannot agree with you that he is "a damned good writer".*—TW

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Editorial (cont. from page 5)
This does not mean that someone in upper meckie neckie N.Y. doesn't get off on machines. You cannot censor without being selfish to your own opinions. How do you know that you aren't wrong? Are you God? Hello God.

"If I created a fantasy world that I desired readers to like I would not give it a name as ghastly as Gor."

THESE TWO PEOPLE have each been reading the same magazine. One accuses me of publishing pornography; the other accuses me of censorship, book-burning, and an anti-pornographic stance.

In microcosm, that's an excellent illustration of why it's difficult to please all one's readers at one time. Basically, we each bring our own attitudes to what we read—and we read the same things very differently. Readers Shanken and May have very different attitudes and have read into what I've written and what I've published here almost diametrically opposed points of view. And I recognize what I have actually done in the statements of neither one.

I don't believe any "hot buttered pornography" has appeared here—and the specifics Shanken offers ("Twelve inch peckers . . ." etc.) don't ring any bells with me—I cannot recall their appearance here in any guise. But that does not mean that sex in many various forms has not appeared in these pages. Dennis More's "The Atheling's Wife," in this issue, has a lusty approach to sixth-century sex. Moreover, he has depicted a semi-barbarian society with striking fidelity to detail, including the sexual roles played by men and women—but his women are not compliant slaves, tortured into willing sexual submission. They are people in their own right, dealing with their world as they find it and finding what pleasures it can afford them. That rings true to me in a way that *Marauders of Gor* rang false. In this issue Grania Davis depicts the social milleau of two middle-aged homosexuals and their confrontation with the hippie invasion of San Francisco in the sixties; she takes a realistic stance (and I hope we don't get a lot of letters from Gay Libbers protesting homosexual stereotyping) and does so without either leering or moralizing. Is this pornography? I don't think so. What is happening here is the expansion of horizons in fantasy fiction.

But reader May totally confuses my position on the Gor novels. I do not advocate their censorship, nor am I a bookburner. (Those who know me will chuckle at the very thought.) However, I know of no reason why I cannot criticise the Gor novels to the extent that I have. What May is advocating *is* censorship: the censorship of criticism—which he equates with censorship itself.

I quite agree that censorship is in most cases an "act of repression". And I believe that each of us has the right to read (or see) what he or she desires and to form his or her own opinion about that work.

But at this point we arrive at a fine moral point: all works of fiction (or art) are not of equal quality. Further, not all works offer viewpoints of equal validity or insight. And although in an ideal world everyone would recognize this fact without the need for pointing it out, in our real world this is, sadly, not so.

The First Amendment guarantees the right to free speech. Nonetheless, it has been determined by courts that "free speech" does not include the right to shout *"Fire!"* in a crowded

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theater. And for good reason: such an irresponsible action (whether in fact there is a fire or there isn't) leads to panic and potential deaths. A greater moral value takes precidence over that of free speech.

Throughout the sixties I supported the right of pornography—hardcore porn, of the type which can now be purchased in any large city—to fall under the First Amendment guarantee. I did so because I was convinced that there was no danger to the public in the publication of sexually explicit materials, and indeed there might be a salutory effect in the publication of works designed specifically to arouse the reader sexually. In principle I still support this stand.

But I overlooked several factors. One was that some of those who created such pornography would have what might best be described as diseased minds. I was aware of the "boredom factor" in pornography—that, after a certain point, one grows bored with continued depictions of sexual acts for their own sake—but I hoped this would lead to better quality porn: pornography which was better-written, more genuinely insightful, using characters who were more solid, more three-dimensional, and thus more involving for the reader. This has not proved—to date—to be the case.

Instead, pornography has moved increasingly into what "forbidden" areas remained. When healthy heterosexual sex became old-hat, the trend was first to lesbian encounters (not as they actually occur, but as men might *like* them to occur in their fantasies) and then to male homosexuality. This occurred more than five years ago. Since then the trend has been increasingly to "bondage"—sado-masochistic encounters, torture, etc., and to such toilet-training taboos as urine drinking, "golden showers" and the like. The most recent trends have been outside written pornography—in which, the reader realizes, *anything* can be described, no matter how impossible—in the area of photographs and movies. Both have begun to introduce children of both sexes into sexual situations with adults (both "heterosexual" and otherwise) and the biggest news of the last six months has been the semi-mythical "snuff movies" in which hapless "actresses" are murdered on-camera.

These trends in pornography are an attempt to revive an increasingly jaded audience to make new purchases, to continue to patronize pornography by overcoming boredom with shock. I have seen photos of eight- and ten-year-old children involved in sexual intercourse with adults. The first were indeed shocking. Subsequent pictures were much less so. And the movie, *Snuff*, has made headlines around the country by cashing in on the publicity in the newspapers about suspected *real* "snuff films"—which *Snuff* is not. (Apparently a lot of women's groups played into the hands of the film's promoters by taking its publicity at face value and organizing protests against the film. All they did was to increase the publicity surrounding the film, of course, and to give it a legitimacy it otherwise lacked, guaranteeing better boxoffice receipts.)

Well, where does it end? *Does* the First Amendment guarantee the right to simulate the murder and disembowelling of a woman on-camera, for the titillation of jaded sexual appetites among men who either overtly or covertly hate women? And if it does, does this mean we must applaud?

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A fine moral point, indeed.

Marauders of Gor is a trashy book. It is ineptly written and conceived to appease the sexual fantasies of an adolescent misogynist. But I don't advocate its censorship, nor would I burn it. (*My* copy was burned, however, along with a great many more worthwhile books, in the fire which occurred in my house last August.) I do insist, though, on my right to express my opinion of the book. And I will continue to publish *your* opinions as well.

(May's letter contains several other false assuptions, as well as that which motivated this editorial. The most blatant is his statement that "100 years ago we didn't have women machinists. Women were slaves to the men of western society good only to have children. Victorian males considered female orgasm a myth not worth joking about." In most respects, this just wasn't true. One hundred years ago we had damned few *male* machinists. But women and children worked in the early English factories and mills, as did men. Although the work was dangerous and the hours exhausting, men and women and children flocked to the mills from the farms—because the money, though small, was more than most had ever earned before. But that was in England, where the industrial revolution began. "Western society" includes Europe—still in the feudal and post-feudal era then—and North America, which was then still primarily an agricultural/frontier society where men and women and children all worked together in the fields and on the farms—all "slaves" to the desire to subsist. "Victorian males" did not exist for the most part in this country—they occupied the upper classes only in England, and represented a small minority of the actual population. Nor were Victorian males unaware of female orgasms, if *My Secret Life*, the sexual autobiography of one Victorian male, is any indication. May has, I think, grossly overgeneralized, simply because the morés of Victorian society were and remain more visible than the complex social realities which actually obtained in those times.)

YOU'VE PROBABLY NOTICED, if you're a regular reader of this magazine, that we've been skipping issues recently. That is, the February issue was followed not by an April issue but rather by the May issue. And there was no July issue; this issue is dated August.

The sad fact is that sales fell dramatically with the introduction of our $1.00 cover price, and although it's too soon to know whether that was just a one-time situation or not, we were forced to change from a bimonthly publication schedule to a quarterly schedule. For that reason the next issue will be dated November.

Frankly, I'm very unhappy about this turn of events, as is the Publisher. I feel that in the last year we've published an unusually wide variety of fantasy and that the actual quality of our fiction has been steadily improving. I feel that the issues of the last year have been issues any editor might justifiably take pride in. And I'm saddened that this has not been reflected by sales.

My only response to this disheartening situation has been to push to make FANTASTIC even *better*. I'm proud of this issue; I'm proud to be able to present here both the works of major authors—like de Camp and Davidson—and those of less-well-known writers who show exciting

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promise—like Davis, More, Utley, Bischoff and Nabors—as well as those whom you've come to regard as unique to this magazine, like Ova Hamlet and Lin Carter (in posthumous collaboration with Clark Ashton Smith). FANTASTIC covers the broadest spectrum of fantasy—more so than any other magazine being published—and will continue to do so. With your support, perhaps we can turn the tide on flagging sales and return in the not too distant future to a more frequent schedule of publication. I hope so.

—TED WHITE

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